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# TRADITION
## AND
# HUGH WALPOLE

BY

# CLEMENCE DANE

*Novels*

REGIMENT OF WOMEN

FIRST THE BLADE

LEGEND

WANDERING STARS

THE BABYONS

ENTER SIR JOHN
(With Helen Simpson)

*Plays*

A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

WILL SHAKESPEARE

THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

GRANITE

MARINERS

ADAM'S OPERA

*Criticism*

TRADITION AND HUGH WALPOLE

THE WOMEN'S SIDE

# *TRADITION*
# *AND*
# HUGH WALPOLE

*BY CLEMENCE DANE*

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FIRST EDITION

*ETHEL'S BOOK*

ALMOST *all the great writers of the past, if they have not appealed to the Man in the Street, have won the interest of the Plain Man, who to my thinking is the Man in the Street, plus a little culture. Moreover I do believe most profoundly that Art cannot separate itself from the past, but must build on it, engrafting the experience, modes and novelties of its own immediate time upon the great body of Art that has preceded it.*

—*Reading*, HUGH WALPOLE.

# TRADITION
## AND
# HUGH WALPOLE

## *CHAPTER I*

THE most illuminating fact about any woman is the tally of her lovers. Just so, the most revealing fact about any writer is his following of readers. A woman's lovers, a writer's readers are the mirror of Rabesqurat. For, says Meredith, when Rabesqurat, the queen of illusions, called

for her mirror, her servant brought in one hand a sack, in the other a tray—

so he emptied the contents of the sack on the surface of the tray; surely they were human eyes! And the queen flung aside her tresses, and stood over them. The youth saw her smile at them, and assume tender and taunting manners before them, and imperious manners, killing glances, till in each of the eyes there was a sparkle. Then she flung back her head as one that feedeth on a mighty triumph, exclaiming, "Yet am I Rabesqurat! Wide is my sovereignty."

But later, when the illusion of her beauty was dispelled, she was shown, like Duessa, for what she was:

Then the sackful of eyes saw the sight, and sickened, rolling their whites.

A writer, who is, of necessity, the servant of illusion, cannot escape the reflection of this mirror: and finds his image, in his lifetime at any rate, often enough and strangely enough distorted therein. Yet this mirror of readers' eyes is, in the long run, fairly reliable.

It is the old saying over again—"Show me a man's friends and I'll tell you what he is!" Shakespeare's friends now—who are they? The

circle at the Mermaid? The gallery at the Old Vic? Sarah Siddons? A pack of schoolboys rehearsing *Macbeth* in their scanty free time? A dark lady? A down-at-heel tragedian reciting up and down the pit queues for pence? Sir Sidney Lee? Sir Edwin Durning Lawrence? You? Me? —or an old German hausfrau who, at eighty-five, still uncontrollable, cooked and laundered for her family, but relaxed over William Shakespeare in Schlegel's translation from nine-forty-five till eleven o'clock of the night?

What does such a list prove? First, that Shakespeare's outstanding quality is what Bradley calls "his myriad-mindedness," his universal appeal; but second, that the study of his readers does discover the chief quality of the writer: that it is a safe rough guide also to a writer's character and the character of his work. It may be objected that his circle of Gentle Readers may be able to make a perfect picture of a small writer, but that the bigger a writer becomes and the more diverse his appeal becomes, the vaguer in turn becomes his portrait: until, as in the case of a Shakespeare, a Goethe, or a Dante, the mirror reflects not so much a human being as a human quality. Shake-

speare, Goethe, Dante reflect Humanity, Vitality, Spiritual Passion—not themselves. But that, surely, is as it should be. Carry the thought further. No writer is read by everybody: the only creator recognized by everyone is God. So, if you could see what image every living creature made in his mind when you spoke of the Creator Himself, then you would see God as He is; but you would not see a person. Nevertheless God would see Himself and must see Himself thus reflected. Indeed there is a truth in the legend that begins so many primitive religions, the legend that the first god was lonely, and created the universe in order to see himself and know what manner of god he was.

But to return to creators with a small letter. This testing of a writer by his readers prompts another question. Does the artist create his audience, or does the audience create the artist? Did Rossetti call into existence the Rossetti type, or did the already existing type force recognition of itself from Rossetti? Were the Georgians ready for Defoe and Richardson and Fielding, did the national literary consciousness desire them into existence as writers, or did the fact that *Crusoe,*

*Pamela,* and *Tom Jones* were written and printed create the circles of willing readers, just as they created the lesser novels of the period—the *David Simples, Peter Wilkins, John Buncles* —not to speak of the mere derivative hack-work turned out by the anonymous and unknown? What happened between the reader and his writer at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century? And after any book-of-the-year, what happens? Does the writer produce the insatiable reader, or is it the other way on?

I think that it is the other way on. The writer is first a reader: the cook is first hungry. The fact is that every normal human being likes, since his childhood has liked, to be told stories. He carries over the hankering into maturity: and though he never reads a novel, never loses the hankering, or where would the newspapers be? If it be true, as some psychologists assert, that the average mind reaches its full development between fourteen and fifteen, that even the mind of a genius does not develop after twenty, that the rest of the human history concerns itself with the acquisition of wisdom, not with the unfolding of char-

acter, then we must turn back to childhood itself to understand the likes and dislikes of the mature reader. The Gentle Reader becomes once more the baby clamouring:

"Tell me a story of Jack-a-Manory—"

and the Writer is revealed as the harassed nurse responding hastily with:

"And now my story's begun!"

And the beginnings of all our novels can be found in the likes and dislikes of a group of children.

It is worth considering the reactions of such a group to a typical book. There are still children lucky enough to be brought up on the Bible and to enjoy the Bible; but each type of child enjoys it for a different reason. The imaginative child has read it for its wonders, goes on from the Witch of Endor and the fall of manna to fairy tales or the *Arabian Nights,* to become in adult life the evoker of all fantastic novels, from *The Castle of Otranto* to *The Tower of Oblivion.*

A second type of child reader is attracted by

the morality of the Bible, especially the morality of the Old Testament. The normal child loves a moral and quite agrees with the ruling, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Virtue must be crowned: vice must be punished. How else can you have a happy ending? And in later life this type of reader requires above all things the happy ending. One fancies that Hans Andersen is so curiously unpopular with children, at any rate with English children, because they are never sure of the sort of ending they are going to get from him. The end of "The Little Mermaid" is pronounced "not fair!" and the end of "The Little Match Girl" "too sad!" by the average child. "The Marsh King's Daughter" is disappointing because the Priest and the Princess marry neither each other nor anyone else: true, there is a heavenly vision; but heavenly visions are a cheating end to the small child, who is, remember, the average reader in a state of innocence! Of this reader the novel-with-a-purpose is born.

To these two types must be added the child who likes autobiography. Most children like

autobiography: indeed, you generally have a success if you tell a child a tale about itself—as Barrie knows. He tells us how he knows in *The Little White Bird.* He was able to content his friend David, aged seven, and a romantic, with tales of *Peter Pan,* till Oliver, the realist, arrived. Then, a writer fighting another writer for possession of his Gentle Reader's imagination, he had to fight for the possession of David. He won!

With wrecked islands I did it. I began in the most unpretentious way by telling them a story which might last an hour, and favoured by many an unexpected wind it lasted eighteen months. It started as the wreck of the simple Swiss family who looked up and saw the butter-tree, but soon a glorious inspiration of the night turned it into the wreck of the David A—— and Oliver Bailey. . . . As we walked in the Gardens I told them of the hut they had built; and they were inflated but not surprised. On the other hand they looked for surprise from me.

"Did we tell you about the eggs we found in the sand?" asked Oliver, reverting to deeds of theirs of which I had previously told them.

"You did."

"Who found them?" demanded David, not as one who needed information, but after the manner of a schoolmaster.

"They were found," I said, "by David A——, the younger of the two youths."

"Who stabbed the wild pig?" asked the older of the two youths.

"Oliver Bailey," I replied.

"Was it Oliver," asked David sharply, "that found the cocoa-nut tree first?"

"On the contrary," I answered, "it was first observed by David, who immediately climbed it, remarking, 'This is certainly the *Cocos nucifera,* for see, dear Oliver, the slender columns supporting the crown of leaves, which fall with a grace that no art can imitate.' "

"That's what I said," remarked David with a wave of his hand.

"I said things like that too," Oliver insisted.

"No, you didn't then," said David.

"Yes, I did so."

"No, you didn't so."

"Shut up."

For the pure realist likes his novel possible. He will not have fairies even on a desert island: he hates a moral. He wants "what really happened," first about himself, then about any hero in the story; for the slide over from autobiography to biography is easy, indeed inevitable. David's island becomes, in a year or two, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*: and from the *Treasure Island* of the adolescent it is but a step on, not to Prospero's, but to Robinson Crusoe's island: and

thus the realists's novel is called into being. Yet so amazingly flexible and all-serving is the novel form that in each division all the types of readers can still be satisfied. There is *Avalon* for the romantic, there is, for the moralist, the *Island of Dr. Moreau.* For the demand may create the supply, but it is not therefore to be supposed that the supplier is a mere servant. The writer admits that he must give the reader what the reader wants, but still he insists on giving it in his own way. A. Thackeray can persuade a child who hates fairy tales to make an exception of *The Rose and the Ring.* The child who enjoys the dreadful *Elsie* books can be lured, by exhibiting her smugness, into appreciation of the brilliant story-telling of Charlotte Yonge: and the dreamiest small rider on the unicorn will jump off to help milk Crusoe's goat.

I catalogue, of course, the favourite books of the generation that I know best. I daresay that David's adventures are already out of date, that *Alice in Wonderland, Midshipman Easy, Bevis,* and *The Wide, Wide World* have gone the way of *Sandford and Merton, Harry and Lucy,* and *Rosamond and the Purple Jar.* A small child told

me only yesterday that *Little Women* was "too old-fashioned for her": and Kipling's most fascinating first detective story, published in a popular magazine, missed its mark (to my knowledge) with dozens of youthful readers, because they, poor modern unfortunates, had never heard of *Mary's Meadow* and dear, dearest Mrs. Ewing. Each generation, of course, has to stock its own bookshelf anew. Yet the type of book chosen by each type of child remains surely the same. Remember the library of the three youngsters in *Stalky & Co.* Stalky, the realist, read Jorrocks: McTurk, the fanatic, read Ruskin: Beetle, the poet, read everything he could lay his eyes on, but specialized in Browning, and was seduced from duty by queer titles—"Fletcher and the Purple Island: an odd theme purporting to be a translation of something called a Rubaiyat: little tales of a heady and bewildering nature interspersed with unusual songs—Peacock was that writer's name": and Borrow, and some Russians.

I don't suggest for a moment that the three types form up in rigid regiments into which an alien taste is not admissible. On the contrary, the types melt into each other and out again like the

colours of the rainbow: and there is always the freak reader to be allowed for, the reader who is not governed by his own real life tastes in his reading, but by some obstinate, unaccountable whim. Dorothy Osborne, sanest, sweetest and most human of Englishwomen, had a passion for the artificial romances of the *Parthenissa* type, even though she boggled at Parthenissa herself: and Landor wept over Little Nell. But despite such grasshopper individualists, and despite the endless varieties within the types, the classification serves: the three types of child reader are roughly the three types that in later life influence by their demands the form and content of the English novel.

But if it be agreed that the small fantastic becomes in time the reader of romances: the small moralist the evoker of the novel of manners: while the small realist turns into the reader of the chronicle novel, still a question remains: Which of these three is the Gentle Reader himself? Which is the evoker of the typical English novel, if there is such a thing?

The English are the English, unmistakable from China to Peru. Nevertheless Dane, Nor-

man, Saxon, Angle, Iberian, Celt, and the Lost Tribes themselves for all I know—types as different as apples and pineapples—are responsible for that unmistakable individual—the Englishman. In much the same way these three types, with all their subdivisions of taste, have managed between them to create a Gentle Reader, as his story-tellers used to call him, an unmistakable Born Reader, that all writers recognize and most writers trust. Here is his portrait, drawn by the novelist with whose work these papers are principally concerned:

> Almost all the great writers of the past, if they have not appealed to the man in the street, have won the interest of the plain man, who, to my way of thinking, is the man in the street plus a little culture.

"A little culture" is vague; but one may, I suppose, translate "culture" by "equipment"—the power to read easily, a certain "instinct" that warns him against insincerity, a sense of humour, a fair ear, a willing soul, a hungry imagination, and curiosity. This "plain man" of Hugh Walpole's is none other than the "Gentle Reader" of a courtlier day. Hugh Walpole goes on (the passage is taken from his paper on "Reading"):

I do believe most profoundly that art cannot separate itself from the past, but must build on it, engrafting the experience, modes and novelties of its own immediate time upon the great body of art that has preceded it.

In other words, the living novel to-day grows out of the writer's realization not only of what his Gentle Reader needs to-day, but of what, in the old times before him, the same reader needed and received. For the reader and writer are one flesh: and of their union the living book is born. And just as the reader to-day is a blend of the three main types of English taste in reading, so, it seems to me, the typical English novel—I call it the traditive novel—is the result of innumerable responses to the demands of that blend. The moralist, the romantic, and the realist demanded of English literature a type of novelist and a type of novel that should, from generation to generation, understand and satisfy their combined hungers: they demanded, not a traditional, but a traditive novel: a novel based on tradition, but not dependent on tradition.

Let us see how they got it!

## *CHAPTER II*

THE English novel is rooted in the ballad, the folk-tale, the romance. The English novel is like the English Thames: it runs through the country of English literature, one of the most important, but by no means the only important river of the kingdom. Like the Thames it is fed

by innumerable lesser streams and its source is disputed, for half-a-dozen streamlets claim the honour. Wherever it begins, it is a simple affair, a trickle of water welling out of the ground; nevertheless the English Thames springs from English ground, and the English novel springs from the English character. It doesn't much matter which streamlet first feeds the mighty track, for all contribute.

The modern novelist, clamouring for plots, reads *The Cruel Brother,* or *Glasgerion,* or *The Nut-Brown Maid,* and says enviously that a good collection of ballads contains all the themes of all the novels. He turns to the chronicles and the gossips—Bede, Roger, Holinshed, Kirby, Hone—and finds that they too have been plundered by his elders, from Beckford to Scott, from Scott to Kipling. "Hone is a mine anyone can work!" He turns to the early poets only to realize that each *Canterbury Tale* is a novel as far as the contents are concerned. And what else are the romances? What else, from his special point of view, is *Beowulf?*

But the traditive novel, in the form in which we enjoy it to-day, did not come to birth till long

after the first press was set up in England. The passionate lover of the Elizabethan genius claims, and if he rules out the great romances—*Morte d'Arthur, The Recueil History,* and the rest—fairly may claim, that the first true novels were born in Elizabeth's day. *Euphues* is the prototype of every book-of-the-year, and like all such children of famosity it followed and immortalized a fashion. Dip into Elizabethan prose after 1580 and you are pretty soon asking yourself—what bee has stung them newly? The industrious bee may not have been, in fact, John Lyly.

Antonio de Guevara may have invented the manner, Ascham may have defined it, and Hellowes and North introduced it to the English wits before the publication of *Euphues,* but John Lyly will always be given the credit for Euphuism, just as Wilde and not Disraeli is given credit for the "æsthetic" manner. The interest for us lies, not in discussing the origins of Euphuism, but in the fact that the Elizabethan Gentle Reader adored the book called *Euphues.* But the Gentle Reader—he or she—always has a weakness for the "stunt" novel. He has suffered from *Weltschmerz* with Werther and the Corsair: she has

made a fool of herself through much reading of Mrs. Radcliffe and *The Horrid Mysteries,* as Miss Austen points out in *Northanger Abbey* and Barrett in *The Heroine.* But she is not more ridiculous than Oscar Wilde's greenery-yallery-foot-in-the-grave young man and his complementary souls feminine: and in our day Aldous Huxley and James Joyce will recognize, ruefully, that they in turn are reflected in the mirror of Rabesqurat.

Its novelty, its morality, and its manners made *Euphues* and afterward *The Arcadia* justly popular with the Elizabethan Gentle Reader. For it is the morals (I don't mean sex morals) of this type of writer which make his writing the rage. Lyly, Richardson, Byron, Poe, Wilde, Wells, and James Joyce live or die in literature itself for reasons of art; but their *fashion* was and is the result of confronting the thrilled Gentle Reader of their day, in a captivating manner with a new set of standards. The captivating manner is always necessary: truth must be fascinatingly dressed. The Elizabethan moralist preferred his *Euphues,* the Elizabethan romantic adored his Lodge: both would have united in detesting those

dreadful pieces (written by romantics too, who ought to have known better) Nash's *Unfortunate Traveller* and Green's *Life and Death of Ned Browne.*

But such pieces are the very life-blood of the novel. *Euphues* is full of amusing and still charming conceits. You pick them out of that astonishing text like plums out of a too-rich Christmas cake. I never hear the Oxford manner in full swing without a sentence from *Euphues* sticking up its head in my mind:

> There is no tree but has some blast, no countenance but has some blemish: and shall Oxford then be blameless?

Nevertheless there is not a line in the whole of *Euphues* that can stand up to *Jack Wilton* when it comes to phrases that refuse to die out of my memory:

> It is my good lucke or my ill, I know not which, to come just to ye fighting of the battel, where I saw a wonderful spectacle of bloudshed on both sides; here the unwildy Swizers, wallowing in their gore like an ox in his doung, there the sprightly French twirling and turning on the stayned grasse like roach new taken out of the streame.

That is the authentic moment for which you

may search your novel if you want to decide its place in literature. Because *Euphues* contains no such phrases, it survives as a curiosity, and its author as a mere uncle of the English novel. But *Jack Wilton,* because of half-a-dozen such phrases to the page, survives as an integral part, and Nash as a true parent and original of the English novel. And Greene, who was romantic and realist as well, has his place not because of *Menaphon,* but because of his *Life and Death of Ned Browne.*

There are many moments in the English novel —the bundle falling off Christian's back, Crusoe finding the footprint, Jane Austen's Captain Wentworth writing his letter in the crowded inn parlour, the little boy in *Wuthering Heights* "crying terribly" because "there's Heathcliffe and a woman, yonder under t'nab, un' I darnut pass 'em, Silas Marner mistaking the child's curls for his lost gold, Morris, a stone bound about his heels, in a plaid hurtled into the loch by Rob Roy's men, Lucy eating dewberries while Richard Feverel watches, Angel Clare watching the flag run up at Tess's hanging, the head and shoulders of Lord Jim "upright above the box while his

soul writhed within him," the gramophone breaking out in the voice of the murdered man in Oliver Onions's *Debit Account*—but none surpass the electric effect of the opening of *Ned Browne.*

> And for Ned Browne . . . he was a man infamous for his bad course of life and well knowne about London . . . But at last hee leapt at a daysie for his loose kind of life, and therefore imagine you now see him in his owne person, standing in a great bay windowe with a halter about his necke ready to be hanged, desperately pronounsing this his whole course of life and confesseth as followeth.

Can any writer beat the insolent demand—command—of Robert Greene's adjuration to his Gentle Reader—"Therefore imagine——"?

Such moments are high-tide marks of the English novel: and they are all, you may notice, triumphs of the realist in a writer. For, from Greene to Conrad, each "moment" depends for effect on the use at the critical point of the description of some utterly commonplace external object—a window, a bundle, a footprint, a letter, a frightened urchin, a spray of bramble, a gramophone—to set the imagination throbbing: just as a whiff of common scent—hay, whitethorn, or seaweed—will set ablaze, like autumn tinder, the

dry memories of years. These realists present us with certain little facts and leave our imaginations to do the rest of the work for them. They draw no moral: they spin no fantasy: they speak the word which creates, and often as not chuckle while they speak. Now the romantic and the moralist seldom chuckle.

It seems then that the first ingredient necessary in compounding the typical English novel is realism. History says so. The moralists and the romantics, ignoring the streamlet of Greene and Nash, had it all their own way till Bunyan came: and what is left of their efforts? A pack of unreadable romances! But Bunyan came: his moral fervour had to be served: his imagination rejoiced to serve it. Then he called realism to help him to preach the Kingdom—and the result, much as it would have horrified him to be told so, was the first traditive novel.

After that union, though the realistic novel was constantly able to separate itself from the main stream, the progress of the traditive novel can be quite easily traced. Defoe is pure realist; but Addison kept the delightful combination flowing: while Richardson and Fielding are each

an unequal blend of two of the three types. Both are realists: both are moralists: even though Richardson's kitten Pamela, and still more Fielding's sleek cat Amelia, are a shock to the modern reader. For Richardson and Fielding were each assured that they had drawn "the perfect woman nobly planned," though Gentle Readers did not as whole-heartedly agree with Richardson's estimate as they did with Fielding's. *Pamela* from the start roused doubts. There was a *Mrs. Shamela Andrews* following pretty closely on her publication: and Fielding, in *Joseph Andrews,* made it quite clear what he thought of her. Fielding's account of her interview with her brother reads like a comic version of Regan's behaviour after she had received her portion. And it is to be particularly noticed that she, the pious, the proper, the perfect, is reproved by Parson Adams for, of all things in the world, laughing in church. What did Richardson call *Joseph Andrews?*— "A lewd and ungenerous engraftment!" As Stalky would say—"Awf'ly annoyed he was. Don't wonder!"

And yet one likes Pamela, minx that she is: and, a little impatiently, one loves Clarissa; but it is impossible for any woman to love Fielding's

Amelia, though she has taken in all the masculine critics from Fielding himself to Walter Raleigh: "And it may be doubted whether a figure so beautiful and at the same time so perfectly lifelike as Amelia has ever been drawn in the whole range of English prose fiction," says Raleigh—and leaves us with nothing to say! But there is no accounting for taste; for women who find Fielding's men human and lovable, find his women (Sophia is well enough) on the whole repellent. As for Amelia, she shocks us. We can do with her namesake, Thackeray's Amelia: we believe in her devotion, her meekness, her amiability, and like her for it. She is a fool, but a sweet fool. You can no more be impatient with Amelia than you can be impatient with a charming tame rabbit nibbling its innocent nose at you through the wires of its cage. All can be forgiven a stupid woman who is sweet. But Fielding's Amelia is no more stupid than her cousin, Richardson's Pamela. On the contrary, she is highly intelligent. She treats her husband as a naughty lap-dog that occasionally goes poaching. It is never very serious: he never catches anything: wipe his paws and kiss his nose and say no more! That is shrewd

Amelia's morality, her wifely devotion, her idea of love—and Fielding's—and the Eighteenth Century's! But it ought not to be ours. Amelia is, as Raleigh says, perfectly alive; but she should be compared with a Di Vernon or an Anne Eliot, a Shirley, a Maggie, before you say of her, as it is still the custom to say—"the most beautiful woman's character in English fiction!" She exists, on the contrary, to prove that Fielding, who filled his novels of real life with his own wisdom, his altruism, and his huge ironic laughter, knew nothing of the true romance. He is a moralist and a realist, not a poet.

Nor is Richardson a poet. There is, in Richardson's novels, a priggish, polluted, suburban sort of romance, and a quite definite and quite intolerable morality, but no conscious humour, no fantasy, no poetry. But as a realist there is no one quite like Richardson: he is as fascinating as a good map.

Richardson and Fielding widen the stream of the English novel to a torrent, and are re-inforced by Smollett who, deriving direct from Defoe, ran his own stream within the main flood, but clearly distinguishable from it, as the waters of

the Aar from the Rhone where they join at Geneva. Swift, moralist, realist, and fantastic, poured the bitter waters of his humour into the blend: and Sterne added the bubbles that danced on the surface. Goldsmith renewed Addison's sweet springs: while from time to time tables of stone—a *Rasselas,* or *The Man of Feeling,* or *Cœlebs,* or *Caleb Williams*—were heaved in with a mighty splash: to sink to the bottom certainly, but to do their share in making firm the bed of that river. Flowers began to blow along the banks—Fanny Burney's garden daisies, Miss Mitford's cowslips: lesser novelists were planting thickets and groves that taste and time have long since cut down again; while Jane Austen established a regular country town, with shrubberies and villas, with suburbs and outlying villages upon the banks, and laid out parks with handsome modern buildings "well situated on rising ground." The novel had left the hills and was running at last through tamed and fertile country. It was a fair and open country, lacking but one thing to be beautiful: it lay all too visible under a noon sun: it needed its twilights and its dawns: there was

no mystery and no magic. It lacked, in fact, its weather, the incessant distorting play of mood upon fact which is poetry.

But the Gentle Reader, once more making his wants felt as, astonishingly, he has always been able to do, was hinting at his need for romance, not only by ignoring Swift's satire in order the better to enjoy his fantasies, but by bringing into existence the "horror" school. It was a slow business; for thrills began with *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, and did not properly over-run the contemporary novel till the 'nineties and the publication of *The Mysteries of Udolpho;* but it was a successful business. The Gentle Reader adored his horror school. He could not be parted from it. If, sated for a moment, he turned to other types of novel in the first half of the Nineteenth Century, toward the end of it he was once more craving horrors into existence. Poe, Bulwer, Wilkie Collins, Stevenson, and, to some extent, Dickens had kept alive his taste for fantastic adventure: Conan Doyle repopularized the vein (Sherlock Holmes is as much a creature of fantasy as Puck), and to-day the craze for shockers is universal. His-

tory has repeated itself: we are as versed in horrid mysteries as Miss Andrews herself. And it is easy to believe that the modern English novel, which is suffering so severely nowadays from specialists, highbrows, and cranks, will benefit as thoroughly from its course of Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie and M. R. James as it did a century ago from its dose of Monk Lewis, Maturin, and Mrs. Radcliffe.

Indeed, the benefits have already begun to arrive. Conrad's *Secret Agent,* Oliver Onions's *Tower of Oblivion,* Masefield's *Sard Harker,* and Walpole's *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* are part of modern literature; but would they have existed if the Gentle Reader, by absorbing himself in thrilling rubbish, had not once more politely called the attention of the principal writers of his day to his just needs? The response was probably unconscious; but there was, at any rate, an instant response.

And just in the same way Scott responded in his day: and did a bigger thing by responding than our writers have a chance of doing. They cannot be pioneers: Scott was before them. But there was no one before Scott. He was the first

man of genius to recognize and understand the importance of his Gentle Reader's craze for shockers. He identified it with that hitherto missing element in the traditive novel, poetry. It is the measure of his myriad-mindedness that he could and did thus identify it.

"What"—we may ask—"What on earth have the gross thrills and manufactured enchantments of the horror school to do with poetry? What has the silliness of Walpole's giant helmet to do with the exquisite terrors of *Wuthering Heights* or *The Turn of the Screw?* What has the shocker to do with art?" But Scott, who knew so much about art because he knew so much about life, anticipated and provided the answer to that question indirectly in *Wandering Willie's Tale* and directly in his criticism or rather his defence of Horace Walpole. Scott says of Walpole that "it is doing injustice to his memory to allege that all he arrived at in *The Castle of Otranto* was "the art of exciting surprise and horror," or in other words the appeal to that secret and reserved feeling of love for the marvellous and supernatural which occupies a different corner

in almost everyone's bosom—and concludes, after an analysis of Walpole's intention as shrewd as it was generous:

> It was the author's object not merely to excite surprise and terror by the introduction of supernatural agency, but *to wind up the feelings of his readers* till they became for a moment identified with those of a ruder age.

There speaks, not only a great artist explaining a lesser brother's attitude to his art (did Horace Walpole ever intend all that Scott read into him?) but also a man who knows and loves his Gentle Readers, their likes, dislikes, their secrets and their humours. We laugh at the shocker-mongers and shocker-fans of our day; but Scott wouldn't have laughed. He never did laugh at any genuine emotion. And because he didn't he is to the novel what Shakespeare is to the play—its king. With the Waverley Novels the tradition of the English novel was established once for all. Its recognized ingredients were to be in future—a good plot, modern or historical, a family background, a love story, adventure to taste, an air of reality, a flavour of fantasy, a happy ending, social or spiritual, some humour,

and now and again a beautiful bloody shock! This was the British traditive novel as the British Gentle Reader conceived it in his thirsty mind: and Sir Walter Scott, letting down his pitcher into the waters, gave him his first long drink.

## *CHAPTER III*

FOR a hundred years Scott's understanding of the Gentle Reader influenced the course of the traditive novel. Scott was indeed in himself, in his life, his character, his tastes, all that the Gentle Reader asks of his favourite book. He was wise, simple, generous: he laughed without sneering:

he was a family man: he loved country life. That is the sort of human being that the average Gentle Reader would like to be, and thinks that, but for bad luck, he might be. And Scott behaved in trouble as the Gentle Reader would like to behave. Scott's courage, his patience, his frank disregard of the claim of art when it conflicted with a claim of honour—all this the Gentle Reader—"the man in the street plus a little culture"—passionately understands and admires. The Gentle Reader loves Scott the more because he wrote poor books in order to pay a debt, rather than save his energy for a masterpiece and remain in debt. For the Gentle Reader puts life and the conduct of life before art and the conduct of art. He must, in the nature of things, do so, must put character before creative ability; because his job is living, not (in the artist's sense) creating. He is the material of the artist: it is his part and his pride to be good material: and so he must put character before art, the nugget before the guinea.

And the traditive novelist must be able to understand and honour this point of view. Scott, who shared it, happened also to be a genius of the first rank. This was pure luck for the tradi-

tive novel. Not every great artist is a normal human being: not in every great artist are the tastes of the reader and the power of the writer evenly blended. But Scott happened to be a true blend of moralist, realist, and romantic. He was also capable of greater technical achievement than his contemporaries and predecessors on account of his range. He could do, in his own way, with words and character, all that Defoe and Swift and Smollett could do, all that Richardson and Fielding could do, all that Addison and Goldsmith and little Burney had done. But he could do more. We have seen how the Gentle Reader hinted to him of a certain "secret and reserved feeling of love for the marvellous." The hint was enough for Scott. He, too, knew that secret feeling. And so he set afloat over the world of his imagination the most exquisite clouds and mists and veilings of pure fantasy. His sunshine was enchanted: his moonlight was faëry. He purified the novel with poetry. Also he reintroduced the spirit of the folk-tale and the folk-song: and so made the novel the expression once more of the life of the people as a whole, instead of the amusement merely of certain classes.

For Scott was not merely a great novelist: he was the greatest of all the traditive novelists. He assembled all the principal parts of the traditive novel between his covers. He depicted family life in every class, from the life of the king to the life of the gipsy: and drew impartially all types —tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, apothecary, ploughboy, gentleman, thief—with their souls feminine. And he gave reality and sympathy just as readily to the eccentric, the fool, and the madman as he did to the normal human being. Nor did his interest in life begin and end with his interest in humanity. He understood the beasts, and understood them as few writers do, not solemnly but with a chuckle. He could stretch out a brother's hand to a countryside, talk with a mountain, and interpret the voice of a flood. Indeed he had, I think, a special sympathy with sounds: not the least of his gifts to the traditive novel was his assumption that his reader must not be made only to read but to see and hear his stories:

"Her last words were—Let him forget me for ever."

"And can she," I said, almost without being conscious that I spoke, "suppose that is possible?"

"All may be forgotten," said the extraordinary female

who addressed me—"all—but the sense of dishonour, and the desire for vengeance."

*"Seid suas!"* (Strike up!) cried the MacGregor, stamping with impatience. The bagpipes sounded and with their thrilling and jarring tones cut short our conference. Our leave of our hostess was taken by silent gestures; and we resumed our journey with an additional proof on my part, that I was beloved by Diana, and was separated from her for ever.

A reader of that passage has surely *heard* the pipes, not merely read of them.

Nor was Scott proud or a highbrow. There was no art for art's sake affectation about him. He understood his Gentle Reader: and was ready to satisfy all his tastes because he sympathized with all his tastes: and so he gave the fashionables what he himself loved to call "Wardour Street" romanticism, and the horror school its underground passages, its dungeons, and its distressed damsels. But he also gave the true romance to such as could appreciate it. The secret of the library at Osbaldiston Hall may be a trick derived from Mrs. Radcliffe; but the parting of Diana and Frank is as real as a parting at Victoria Station in the war. The hasty modern reader, when he cries "old-fashioned," is too easily mis-

led by Scott's Eighteenth Century style. Scott might and did call his heroine an "extraordinary female," but there was a modern woman hidden in the female, just as there is a modern girl hidden in the crinoline of Trollope's Lucy or Meredith's "rogue in porcelain." Scott was a traditive novelist: it was part of his business to use the manner of his day in recreating the manners of the past. But when he chose to draw a modern as a modern he drew a portrait not easy to beat. Frank Osbaldiston left Oxford yesterday, is spurning the Stock Exchange to-day, and will publish his first novel or produce his first film to-morrow or the day after. And if Scott wrote *The Betrothed* and *Count Robert,* for the moment, to pay his debt to his neighbour, he also wrote, not for the moment, and to pay his debt to literature, if not the greatest tragic novel in our language, at any rate one not yet surpassed. There is *Tess,* there is *Wuthering Heights,* there is *The Bride of Lammermoor.* Who will add the fourth?

Scott left the traditive novel so perfected that, though it was steadily enriched, its course was scarcely altered by the masculine writers of the

next hundred years. The new direction came from the women. They added what we call to-day psychology. Every great novelist, of course, has a knowledge of psychology. Nevertheless there is all the difference in the world between psychology and Eighteenth Century character drawing. The Eighteenth Century novelists were absorbed in the study of character as it is revealed in action. Richardson alone (and he wrote for women) was truly interested in the workings of impulse and emotion on character, with a consequent daily modification of character. But the rest of the men novelists, with the women novelists imitating them, were accustomed to show the fixed character driven by emotion to action, not the character in process of reconstruction through emotion preparatory to or consequent upon action. So that, with the limited exception of Richardson, who is as sensitive as a snail's horn to all little zigzags of embarrassment, we must either turn from the novel altogether and go back to Shakespeare, if we want psychology as we use it to-day, or we must turn from Scott to Jane Austen, and so forward with a leap to the Brontës. We get the first hints of the new method—the use of psychol-

ogy in the Shakespearean sense—with the publication of *Sense and Sensibility,* though the Brontës are properly responsible for the new development.

Yet once again, though the writers took the hint, the Gentle Reader (feminine this time) was the true parent and original of the change. Women, barred from non-domestic activity, were always, as Theobald notes a hundred years earlier, enthusiastic readers of Shakespeare—"There is scarce a poet that our English tongue boasts of who is more the subject of the Ladies' reading." It was these readers who required of the novelist the feminine, the Shakespearean, conception of character as a state of soul modified by emotion and events. It is a conception directly opposed to the masculine, the Miltonic conception of character, as mind creating emotion and shaping external events.

But the new conception revolutionized the novel. Jane Austen's hint (she did no more than hint) was at once acted upon, though it was not, I think, at once understood except by the women—such women as Charlotte Yonge and Mrs. Gaskell. Dickens, for instance, uses the new method

in the conversion of Martin Chuzzlewit and Alfred Jingle; but he is not very convincing. At his best he always holds by the older tradition. *Pickwick,* of course, will be at once objected. It is true, and it has constantly been pointed out, that we begin by enjoying Mr. Pickwick as a figure of fun and end by loving him as a human being. But that surely is not because of any development in the character of Mr. Pickwick during the progress of the book. The change is in us. He is the same from the moment when he puts his head out of the window in Goswell Street to the final moment in Dulwich; but we get to know him better. We make his acquaintance and, as he becomes a friend and an old friend, our opinion of his character changes; but his character suffers no change. The same may be said of Thackeray's Becky Sharp, and in a measure of his Beatrice. Beatrice develops more than Becky on the surface; but from her first appearance she is doomed to end exactly as she does end. The character is fixed and unimpressible—a creation of the Eighteenth Century novel. But does one know from moment to moment what is going to happen to the Crawfords in *Mansfield Park?*

Does one ever know what Emma will do next? Never—no more than we know what Hamlet or Othello will do next, until they have done that thing: and then we know that it is the only thing they could do.

Jane Austen's hint that character formation, and consequently plot formation, is an hourly process in life and the novel, becomes with the Brontës a statement, a creed. Jane Austen, pure artist, hints and is done. The Brontës, passionate prisoners of life, using the novel to prize apart the bars between them and emotional freedom, cannot be content with hinting. These women, so primitive, yet so modern, with their view of human beings as pots jostling each other in the stream of life, and doomed sooner or later to be smashed by their fellow pots, these sisters not only gave a new direction to the novel, but poured into it a new element. The soul and its struggle with the body was their concern: "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams," cry the Brontës, harking back to Shakespeare. It is their dreams that they give us, the story of life within the nutshell. All their crea-

tions are isolated—Lucy Snowe, the Professor, the wife in *Wildfell Hall,* Jane Eyre, Caroline Helstone—these are the loneliest creatures that ever lived: and Heathcliffe is Robinson Crusoe stranded upon another sort of island.

The Brontës' contribution coloured the waters of the English novel for all time. They annexed to the domain of the traditive novel the sovereignty of the inner, the unexpressed, perhaps inexpressible world of the soul. Till then the novel had dealt with the conversion of thought into action: the Brontës dealt with the conversion of emotion into thought.

They were, of course, soon surpassed. No sooner had they fished the murex up than—

> Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine
> To paint the future from the past,
> Put blue into their line!

But it was not only Hobbs and Nobbs who used the new colour. Saner folk than the Brontës thankfully admitted the new influence and used it in ways the Brontës never knew. But there is no need to weigh claim against claim. There is one greatness of the sun, another of the

moon. The opener of roads and the builder of cities are dependent on each other: and so it is idle to ask whose work ranks higher. Such pioneers were the three Brontës: such builders of new cities were Hardy, Meredith, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, Hawthorne, and Charles Reade. So varied were the uses to which these creators put the inherited novel form, so fertile were they in invention, so ingenious in devices for exploiting its possibilities and amplifying its detail, that, to the Gentle Reader of the Victorian Age, it must have seemed that the evolution of the traditive novel was complete. "The great day of the novel *must* be drawing to a close," thought, said, and wrote the reader of the 'nineties. And yet the century closed, as far as the novel was concerned, not in a sunset glory, but in vigorous noon light.

Judging by the quality of the novels that were published during the first decade of our century, the Victorian Age, modernized and renamed "Edwardian," was merely repeating itself with its own characteristic vigour. Trollope, Meredith, Stevenson, Morris, and the rest of their generation had passed: and Hardy had ceased to write

novels; but Henry James, Moore, Bennett, Hewlett, Conrad, and Onions were vigorously at work. For the Dickens lover there was Wells: for the George Eliot reader the young Galsworthy: Conrad for Brontë enthusiasts: and Kipling as the new century's dark horse. Never were the prospects of an age and a generation brighter.

And then an accident befell the century and its literature. Youth was cut out of the life of both by the Great War! The little "Great Boer War" affected the position of our leading writers no more than the Napoleonic wars affected the lives and output of Scott and Jane Austen. But the European War was another matter. It broke in two the life of the nation: and mentally it did exactly the same to the life of literature. The four years were as a gulf fixed between two states of existence. Only the young could cross it. And so it has come to pass that the elder writers of the day suffer the strange fate of Donander in *The Silver Stallion.* It is natural that these writers who so triumphantly ushered in the new century should now be the directors of its literary life; but it has fallen out otherwise. Our elder writers

have not to complain of neglect: on the contrary, they suffer from too much respect. They have become ancestral—as Hardy years ago became to novel readers. They have been prematurely assigned their places in a past to which they do not as yet belong.

Never surely did a generation of creative artists, violently alive and active, find themselves more oddly situated. The Writer was alive; but his Gentle Reader had escaped him. For the war had obliterated, either directly or vicariously, the public for whom these writers had told tales, the public with whom these writers had grown up, just as it had obliterated the age of which they wrote. It is odd to hear an old soldier and a young soldier discuss, for instance, Kipling's *Soldiers Three*. The old soldier knows that its fidelity to the conditions he knew is unquestionable: the young soldier knows only, and with a shrug, that "times have changed." Much the same deadlock is arrived at when one of the elder writers presents his view of modern woman to modern woman. The portrait may be exquisite but the young women whom our elder writers knew in the learning stage do

not exist to-day: the convention of the eternal feminine has changed as much in four years as it usually changes in forty. And so, when the war was over and literature began once more to have importance, the typical Gentle Reader was no longer the contemporary of the leading Gentle Writer: he belonged to a later group of humanity. The whole pre-war group of writers in their middle period, vigorously creative as it was, found itself either revered as "classic" or derided as Victorian. A fresh novel by Conrad, Galsworthy, or Wells was greeted with something of the grateful delight with which a hitherto unpublished Jane Austen or the conclusion to *Edwin Drood* would be greeted. The end of Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga, Swan Song,* was published recently: and has been welcomed and accepted—as a new novel? No: as a contribution to history. *Swan Song* already existed in the public mind: as the biography of any great dead man already exists, although that biography is not yet in the proof stage. That is to say, the public judges the work of the elder novelists in perspective: their novels are framed and hung in the gallery of literature: for them "varnishing day" and the Academy do

not exist. The post-war public, in fact, has comically accustomed itself to living with what, in a few years' time, it will reverently be calling its classics; but direct contact, actual insult and idolatry, it reserves for a newer generation altogether.

Just such a situation has never before occurred in the history of literature. The last violent upheaval, the French Revolution, did not plunge up out of the water like a whale rising in the middle of a fishing fleet: it arose in a patch of comparative calm as far as the novel was concerned. The Eighteenth Century fleet had long since scattered. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, were dead: "little Burney's" best books were written, and Jane Austen was unpublished when the French Revolution broke out. The upheaval was well over and Napoleon's end in sight when the Writer to the Signet and the parson's daughter between them ushered into existence the Nineteenth Century novel. It was like the landing of Noah and his wife in a virgin world. These two could look back to the previous century, crying: "There were giants in those days!" —but in the new age they themselves were, as

far as the novel is concerned, the only true gods.

Very different was the position at the opening of the present century. For seventy years the English novel had flowered like a Devonshire garden through the months of summer. From Waterloo till the accession of Queen Victoria the history of the novel is the history of the publications of Scott and Jane Austen, Peacock, and of such memorable novelists as Galt, Maria Edgeworth, and Susan Ferrier. The firstlings of Disraeli, Bulwer, Marryat, Ainsworth, G. P. R. James, and the rest of the Regency story-tellers flowered in that period; but not till 1837 did true summer come. That is not only the year of the accession of the Queen: it is the year of *Pickwick*. But from 1837 on every year is memorable. The publishers' lists are astonishing. In 1848, for instance, the Gentle Reader had for his new bed-books *Vanity Fair, The Book of Snobs, Agnes Grey, Mary Barton, Wuthering Heights,* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* In the following year he toyed with *David Copperfield, Pendennis, Shirley,* and *Alton Locke.* A Dickens novel was an all but yearly event. Reade, Hawthorne, Melville tossed

him masterpieces, and with the 'fifties George Eliot arrived. In 1857 his new books included *The Virginians, Barchester Towers, Scenes from Clerical Life, The Romany Rye,* and *John Halifax, Gentleman:* in 1860 he enjoyed *Gryll Grange, Lovel the Widower, The Mill on the Floss,* and *The Woman in White:* in 1861, *Great Expectations, The Adventures of Philip, The Cloister and the Hearth, Framley Parsonage, Silas Marner, Evan Harrington,* and *Elsie Venner:* while in 1865 we get, blooming among some not unremarkable minor pieces, *Rhoda Fleming, Alice in Wonderland,* and Thomas Hardy's first novel.

I pick at random the special years in which I should have liked to be alive and reading from a period in which each year is a miracle of fecundity; but it is a fact that for exactly a hundred years the astonishing output continued. The resources of the English traditive novel were apparently inexhaustible. The century which opened with Jane Austen, the Waverley Novels, and the works of Peacock closes with *Weir of Hermiston, Lord Jim, Lord Ormont and his Aminta, The Sacred Fount, The Invisible Man, Jude the Obscure,*

*The Turn of the Screw, Villa Rubein, The Golden Age, Sentimental Tommy, The Jungle Books,* and *The Two Magics.* Can any other English century show so rich and so prolonged a harvest in any particular department of art?

## *CHAPTER IV*

NEVERTHELESS, as we have seen, the new century put no period to the output of the novel. Kipling, Wells, Moore, James, Bennett, the Irish Ladies, Conrad, Galsworthy, leading a host, that strange belated Victorian William de Morgan accompanying them, marched over into the new

age—that was all. The Gentle Reader certainly noticed very little difference, as far as literature was concerned, between the rule of Victoria and the rule of Edward—the rule of George Eliot and Trollope or the rule of Galsworthy and Bennett. Lovers of Defoe and Richardson had their Bennett, derived via Charlotte Yonge and George Eliot and Gissing. Galsworthy, deriving from Fielding via Trollope and Thackeray, gave them manners and morals: Conrad, realist and fantast, presenting, not the fixed character in action, but the soul under the influence of emotion, satisfied the Brontë lovers and incidentally contributed greatly to a tradition from which he derived nothing: the Irish Ladies are the true traditive blend with no one of the main traits predominant: Barrie, the romantic, is the heir of Addison, Lamb, Goldsmith, Leigh Hunt, and Stevenson: while Kipling, who so hugely influenced the whole future of the traditive novel, though he never wrote a true novel in his life, descends, I suppose, from the Elizabethans via Smollett, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Mark Twain; though one might, of course, make him a dozen pedigrees, for no writer shows in his work a use of the past

so deliberate, so defiant, and so complete, as Kipling. To recognize every quotation, allusion, echo, thought, idea, cadence, manner, or mannerism in Kipling is to be thoroughly acquainted with English literature as a whole. Indeed it is one of the marvels of his genius that, soaked as he is in the literature of the past, he should have so revolutionized the literature of the present. We all "write Kipling" nowadays, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not. Moralist, romantic, realist, born and bred in tradition and bursting out of it like H. G. Wells's giant children in *The Food of the Gods,* he has done more for the continuance and protection of written English than any other author alive and writing to-day. But he has contributed nothing to the actual conventions of the traditive novel. On the contrary, he has followed the modern fashion of pillaging it for his own ends. *Kim* is the old picaresque form revived and spiritualized. *The Light That Failed* is a Browning dramatic monologue in novel form. *The Finest Story in the World* is Lytton-and-genius. On the whole it may be said that instead of enlarging he has shorn and pared, sometimes half pressed to death the traditive novel in his adap-

tation of it to the long-short-story form. His later tales are all full-length novels ruthlessly compressed.

But if Kipling has Bovrilized the novel as Henry James began to do before him, H. G. Wells has blown a hole in it. I once inspected a large and handsome Victorian drawing-room after the boiler behind the Morris tiled fireplace had burst. There were no windows left in that room: all the furniture and the pictures were in bits except to the right and left of the grate, where some silver, a couple of buhl cabinets, and a bronze or two were unharmed. As for the boiler itself, it was found at the bottom of the garden. Now that wrecked room gives us a picture of what Wells, a genius with a passion for pedagogy, has done to the English traditive novel. He began as a true traditive novelist, easily assuming the mantle of Dickens. But the moralist, already in evidence in Dickens, was still more dangerously in evidence in H. G. Wells. His fantasy, his humour, and his realism were a joy to the readers of *The Invisible Man* and *The Knight on Wheels;* but already in *The Food of Gods* the preaching passion was beginning to spoil the story. *Kipps*

and *Mr. Polly* delayed the tragedy, but in *The New Machiavelli* H. G. Wells used the novel definitely as a pulpit: and he has gone on preaching ever since. His sermons have attracted as much attention as Whitefield's: indeed, where Whitefield converted his thousands, H. G. Wells has converted his tens of thousands; but, as far as the novel is concerned, he is already a figure of the past. Mr. Polly, immortal Johnny-Head-in-the-Air, has become a diaphalous memory. There remains Miriam, pursuing with knit brow some mysterious ideal of " 'aving things nice!"

Henry James is dead: Conrad is dead: Wells is a convert: Arnold Bennett's contributions to the English novel are immense, but his creative years are overpassed. Barrie has deserted the novel for the play form: George Moore has for novel readers much the same limited value as Walter Pater: Oliver Onions, who is a fantast-realist among the traditives and, in *The Tower of Oblivion,* created perhaps the most remarkable fantastic novel since *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* has deserted fantasy for satire: May Sinclair in her manipulations of the traditive form (particularly in her *Harriet Frean*) has continued the

experiments of Henry James and Kipling. But of all the older novelists left to-day, the most typical is perhaps John Galsworthy, though even he does not altogether preserve the balance between the three main elements. He all but ignores the element of fantasy, and his sense of romance is narrow in expression. He uses the traditive form greatly, but he does not surrender to it: he does not let it use him for its own purposes.

There is indeed only one writer of standing at work to-day who does thus surrender himself. This is Hugh Walpole, whose position between the elders and the experimentalists is a curious and a rather lonely one. He belongs, by the measure of time, to the group which the younger writers are already beginning to regard as composed of novelists from whom novelty is not to be expected. Compared with the great elders, on the other hand, the group is still at the midway of its career. D. H. Lawrence, Compton Mackenzie, Rose Macaulay, E. M. Forster, W. S. Maugham, St. John Ervine, "Elizabeth," J. Masefield, H. H. Richardson, Osbert Sitwell, J. D. Beresford, Naomi Mitchison, G. B. Stern, C. E. Montague, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Rebecca West, Frank

Swinnerton, Naomi Royde-Smith, Romer Wilson, R. H. Mottram, A. Huxley, and a dozen others, have all carried over, not from the Victorian to the Edwardian, but from the Edwardian to the post-war Georgian. They are in spirit at home in the new conditions because they have been to a certain extent formed by the new conditions: yet their inheritance is the older form. They are all practical users of it; but they use it for their own purposes. They are, in a purely Pickwickian sense, traditive egoists.

These writers have been followed, though not superseded, by the extremely important later group, composed entirely of men and women who have let themselves be moulded solely by the ideas and aims in force during the war and after the war. One may picture the two groups: the intermediate group leaving a camp and walking forward to a new night's lodging: and the latest group, also headed for the same camp, but walking with their faces to the old one, casting at it enfranchised looks of boredom and derision. Of these, typical figures are—James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Wyndham Lewis, and (in form, not in spirit) Walter de la Mare.

Now these very considerable and brilliant experimenters, these camp-makers, these pioneers, depend, just as their elders and their contemporaries do, upon the traditive form for their literary life and livelihood. Though they have left the older camp, shaken off its dust, in some cases with ostentatious caperings and heel-and-toeings, they come from it. But they depend upon it in a new way.

The Eighteenth Century shaped the novel: the Nineteenth Century fulfilled it; but the aim of the post-war Twentieth Century seems to be to disperse its parts once more, and this in the name of realism. The leaders of the movement all began, oddly enough, as traditives, such volumes as *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Tar,* and *Night and Day* bear witness that they were creators; for out of the apparent chaos of life, thought, and sensation, they were conjuring up form and forms with no other aim than the relation of the interwoven motives of these evoked bodies and souls. But time and the chance of history have turned them into destroyers, devoted to the disintegration of the novel, the play, and the older verse. It is difficult for lovers of established forms of

art to appreciate these experiments; but it would be sheer folly not to try and understand the impulse which prompts them as it prompts every revolutionary from Luther to Lenin. It was, after all, formal Wordsworth, not convulsed Shelley, who said—"Carnage is the daughter of God!" And it is possible, though not very pleasant, to realize that destruction may also be a form of creative art. That, at any rate, must be the view of our newest writers, or they could not so persistently practise the dissipation into original chaos of those forms which they themselves once shaped out of chaos. Wordsworth looks at a pansy and it creates in him thoughts "too deep for tears." The modernist, on the other hand, takes his pansy carefully to pieces and records on paper that the *stem* is angular, branched: *leaves* oblong, crenate: *stipules* deeply cut: *terminal lobe* broad, crenate: *sepals* five: *petals* five, sometimes unequal: *anthers* lengthened into a flat membrane: *style* with an oblique hooded stigma: *ovary* one-celled: *seeds* numerous, in three rows: and then, with a twitch of the fingers, returns the portions of the pansy with which he has become thus thoroughly ac-

quainted to the original mother earth from whence it sprang:

> "Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
> Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

cries the bewildered Gentle Reader. But such a protest is perhaps mere romanticism. The disintegrator has, one feels it unwillingly, gained something by this return of a whole, through its parts, to the whole. What does the temporary bewilderment or distress of the reader matter, if the pansy and the art blooms again in its season enriched? And the movement is, at any rate, not an idle or a malicious one: it is not a spectacle of wantonness pulling beauty to pieces, like Kipling's *Bandar-log* in the ruined city collecting pieces of plaster and brick only to forget where they had hidden them, and shaking the rose trees and oranges in sport to see the flowers fall. The disintegrators are destroying with a purpose: in their poems, their plays, and their novels they are splitting up personality, language, and form as industriously as the legendary angels who, aproned and with shears, spend eternity in cutting up the old moons into stars.

They are destroying in order to new-make. The Middle Ages regarded the surviving Greek and Roman temples as heaven-bestowed building material. Our modern disintegrators, in just the same way, treat the traditive form as an outworn structure which must be pulled to pieces if only to clear the ground. It may be possible to use the pieces later; but at any rate it must not cumber the ground on which they intend to erect buildings of their own design.

But this destructive impulse has deeper roots. It is, as always, the reflection of the mood of the Gentle Reader of to-day. The modern writers appear to feel for the older forms something of the fearful hatred which the French mob felt for the Bastille. It represents a general threat and a general danger: the threat of repression, the danger of stagnation: a fear which the whole world has learnt to feel, and which it has repelled by indulgence in license and excess. The novelists translate this general fear into jealousy of their artistic freedom. And their fear has perhaps a certain justification. For the novel is unquestionably in incessant danger of standardization.

The traditive novel, with its high-brows, low-

brows, and middle-brows, is not unlike the Church of England, with its Anglicans, Evangelicals, and Broad Churchmen. Like the Church of England, it is able to keep the peace between its various members and groups and control the many conflicting movements that arise and subside within its pale by virtue of its own elasticity, or, if you choose to decry, by its looseness of structure. But the danger of standardization does remain, for the leader of every movement must needs attempt to pull his fellows in the way he wants to go. And his fellows, individualists all, resist him, and pull every one his own way. The result is that the structure itself remains stationary, like a tent held in place by all its pulling ropes. This is as it should be: for a structure like the English Church or the English novel is too ancient, too long established, to be headed in this or that direction. It can enlarge itself: it can receive and embody the contributions of its pioneering children; but it must itself in a sense be stationary. In the case of the novel the river has become ocean: its own tides move it; but it has no progressive movement toward an unknown goal.

But to the post-war Gentle Reader, and there-

fore to his interpreter, the Writer, to be stationary is to be standardized: and he has learned, by means of the war and the peace after war, a horror of standardization. He is himself a victim of standardization. He is standardized, in fact, by his very terror of standardization. But where? And one falls back, as usual, on the Gentle Reader for an answer: and finds the answer on his bookshelves, for he still wants morals, manners, and romance in his novel. Where among the many does he go to get them? We know where he goes for them among the Elders. He goes to Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, Conrad, Oliver Onions, May Sinclair, the Irish Ladies, "Elizabeth." But to whom among the younger writers does he turn for the satisfaction of his traditive tastes? He reads one group of the moderns for its realism, another for its romance, another for its wit, another for its fantasy, another for its experiment with form, another for expression of the newest of the new ideas. But where does he go for the blend, for the old-fashioned tale with the innovation in idea which modernizes it, which turns the traditional into the traditive novel?

He goes to two writers—one a poet and play-

wright who only occasionally writes novels: the other a novelist who has never done anything else but write novels. He goes to John Masefield and to Hugh Walpole; because, though no two writers of the same period could be more unlike, though they write of different worlds, each satisfies in his own way the main demand of the Gentle Reader for realism, for morality, and for romance. Indeed, John Masefield's position among the modern poets curiously resembles Hugh Walpole's position among the contemporary novelists. Masefield is to poetry and drama what Walpole is to the novel. But they are linked in the novel reader's mind more closely still; for each has made a definite contribution to the future form of the traditive novel: and—it is the same contribution. Each has enriched the novel—Masefield once, in that strange shocker *Sard Harker,* and Hugh Walpole in practically the whole range of his work, by the use of symbollism. James Joyce's use of symbolism is another matter. His books are not to be procured by the general reader. Their influence on the course of the traditional novel has yet to show itself. He hates war, not only because of its horrors. He

hates it for its virtues. War disciplines the individual: and the modern individual is afraid of discipline because discipline finds him out. If he is lacking in individuality, discipline will and does standardize him. Discipline trains the free and the strong to be freer and stronger than they were before; but it sends the characterless back to the button-moulder: and modern man, herded and weakened, has, as Ibsen points out, a terror of the button-moulder as strong as his ancestors' fear of Judgment. And it seems to him that the only refuge from standardization, which is slavery, is anarchy, which he calls freedom. He hesitates between these two extremes—Italy and Russia represent the swing of his pendulum. And his writers express his hesitation and his fear either by taking refuge in the most precise and formal of all the art periods, the Eighteenth Century, or by anarchizing all art forms whatsoever. The Disintegrator does apparently believe that by destroying form he will liberate the abstract idea which it represents, that by destroying the garment men see Him by, God will be revealed. Meantime his experiments in form dissipation are already becoming as standardized as any

traditive art form of his special derision. But that he does not see.

So he continues creating in spite of himself. We owe the revival of the autobiography, thinly disguised, to the Destroyer: and the adaptation of the cinematograph to the purposes of the novel. But though he has contributed in verbal cinematography a manner which has freshened the contemporary novel, and will, as its use is modified by time, be of permanent value, he has made no constructive alteration in the novel's form or content. Cinematography is merely a new manner of presenting old material to the reader; for new material we must look elsewhere.

## *CHAPTER V*

JOHN MASEFIELD, in spite of three romances, one modern tale, and a child's book, influences his contemporaries chiefly through his poems and plays: and so his exact relation to his fellow novelists does not greatly concern the student of the novel and its developments. But the

position of the other experimenter, Hugh Walpole, requires consideration.

It is, of course, from one point of view as undecided and as undecidable as that of any other novelist of his generation. No novels have any final importance till one can walk at least fifty years away from them: and fifty years is short measure. Till then they can only be judged for their effect on their own generation: and one cannot say that Walpole's books have had more noticeable effect on the contemporary Gentle Reader than any other reputable widely read writer of the hour. Speculation then concerning the effect on later generations of Gentle Readers is as idle as it is invidious. If you want to depress and at the same time to reassure any writer trying to do a piece of work that will have more than bread-and-butter value, give him a volume of contemporary popular criticism to read. Even the great critic is not to be read without occasional chuckles. The judgment of Johnson on *Lycidas* should be remembered by readers who are inclined to rely too implicitly on an established reputation for sound judgment. Johnson governed his generation in matters of taste, and was a man of judgment and

feeling; yet this is what he says a hundred years after it was written of a poem which we, three hundred years later, reckon one of the loveliest measures in the language:

> The diction is harsh, the rhyme uncertain, the language unpleasing . . . In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth: there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting. . . .

and so forth, and so on!

If great critics, even with time to help them, can be so unreliable, how can one expect sound judgment from lesser men? Yet we continue to rely on our critics' and our own opinions, regardless of the awful warnings that moulder on the shelves of the public libraries. Has anyone to-day read Jeaffreson's *Novels and Novelists,* or his own novel, *Crewe Rise?* He is not in the encyclopædia, and his two volumes were dusty when I discovered them on the London Library shelves; but he must have once had a public, for he undertook, this valiant man of letters, to sketch for popular instruction the careers of the principal novelists from Elizabeth's day to his own, and to sum up the merits of each. He is as comical a mix-

ture of shrewdness and absurdity as I have ever enjoyed; but it is time that has made him absurd. He can't have been absurd to his own generation. His own generation, by his own showing, obviously agreed with him. His judgments are worth studying just because he was not Hazlitt, not Arnold, but only forgotten Mr. Jeaffreson. Says he of the author of *Our Village:*

> Indeed Miss Mitford, though she lacks the hilosophic depth and breadth of the author of *The Excursion,* more resembles Wordsworth than either Cowper or Crabbe.

Now that remark perfectly represented the Victorian Gentle Readers' estimate of Miss Mitford. The joke of it lies in the fact that we know Miss Mitford as a dear, sound, sweet cowslip-ball-compounding darling, whom it is an insult to take more seriously than she took her own *Village.* We have completely forgotten that she wrote very serious tragedies that were treated very seriously indeed by her own generation.

He says of Wilkie Collins, the prince of shocker writers:

> For some time past his writings would lead one to think him as morbidly enamoured of the horrible and revolting

as Edgar Allan Poe. But we believe that in composing his terrible stories of crime and passion, he is only passing through a phase of mental equipment that will be followed by the production of far nobler works than any that have as yet come from his pen!

That is funny to us. Must Scheherezade change hats with Martin Tupper? But he, the contemporary Victorian, wasn't dreaming of making a joke. He meant what he said, and wrote for a public which solemnly and entirely agreed with him.

And the unfortunate Charles Dickens is thus pilloried with praise:

The distinctiveness of Shakespeare's creation has always been insisted on by his critics, as a perfect illustration of the inexhaustible fertility of his imagination; but it has long been our opinion that Dickens' conceptions surpassed those of our great poet in this important particular as much as they do in number.

Save us from our enthusiasts! Better the Johnsonian judgment than such garlands!

But I have been betrayed into too many quotations from this quaint Mr. Jeaffreson. I didn't open him to quote his words but to copy out his lists. I suppose I have read as many Victorian

novels as the next browser, but in his list of eighty-eight English novelists of importance between the Revolution and 1858 I found that of the eighty-eight I had actually read thirty-three, had just heard of thirty-five, and of the remaining twenty all were unknown to me, and only twelve known to that last refuge of neglected Olympians, the *Encyclopædia Britannica.* Yet each of these unknowns has been given a chapter to itself, while Emily Brontë is tucked in under Charlotte's banner: and Peacock is not mentioned at all. And Mr. Jeaffreson wrote only eighty years ago and obviously represented the popular taste and judgment of his day!

It is plain then that it is idle for contemporaries to forecast what place a writer of novels will be assigned among writers of novels by time and the genius of the novel. But a writer's contribution to the form and material of the novel is another matter. That can be judged in his lifetime. It is easy to see what new thing he contributes, though only time can tell us how well or ill (in comparison with his contemporaries) he has handled his own contribution. And it is interesting to discuss in considerable detail the twenty-odd novels of

Hugh Walpole, not because he is extremely widely read, not even because he is already instinctively classed among the veterans rather than in the brigade of youth; but because he has made a definite and novel addition to the accepted structure of the novel. His stories themselves may live or die—it is too soon to hazard a public guess; but his formal contribution to the traditive novel is bound to continue in use as long as the form is used. It is indeed already in steady use by the youngest generation, and is already the most valuable counter-irritant to the work of the Disintegrators. (That pleasant name is not mine, by the way: I stole it from Geoffrey Faber's *Elnovia.*)

What is this new contribution which so attracts the young experimenter? Youth must express itself or die, and destruction cannot express itself. Destruction is a herd instinct: construction is the impulse of the individual. Youth, of course, enjoys iconoclasm, which is but a grander name for immaturity's passion for a bonfire in the quad'; but as soon as it wants to express itself youth begins to make something. Literary youngest youth, the Gentle Reader and the anxious writer

of to-morrow, may be deeply interested in the attempts of the Disintegrators to split the literary atom, but no sooner does youth put eager pen to fair white paper than it begins to reassemble, to group, to build up a world around the fascinating atom—Self: most first novels are autobiographies. But autobiography soon palls; for autobiography doesn't sell. Then it is that youngest youth discovers that the traditive novel is a useful springboard. The people of a very young man's book are seldom more than photomatographs. He pays a shilling, enters the photographer's cabinet, makes a dozen photographs of himself in a dozen moods, and is satisfied that he has created a world of people. But as an album for these amplifications of himself the young writer generally falls back on the despised traditive form. He rediscovers the fact—as old as the parables—that if you want to air an opinion, display a truth, urge a reform, or preach a gospel, you must tell people stories about it. But allegory is a subtle business. Who to-day save Wells dares to be a Bunyan?—and he lacks the humility of Bunyan. Is there no better modern way of saying what you think about ideas? Youth must

say what it thinks about its own ideas, and allegory is out of date! What is left? The symbol!

"Suppose somebody tried to tell a story about two things at once—a person and an idea—a person who was you or me, and yet all of us! Has anyone ever tried to write that sort of book before?" the youngest Gentle Reader asks himself: and presently recalls readings that stirred him, he didn't know why—of a book called *Fortitude,* and another called, attractively, *Prelude to Adventure:* and a curious, rather beastly shocker, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair:* and a book that stuck in his mind even though some of his friends thought it priggish, a book called *Harmer John.* And the odd thing about these books was this—they were extremely, familiarly easy to read: there was nothing to perplex him in the style or irritate him in the manner (until he "went in" for literature, and then he enjoyed the sense of superiority which their simplicity gave him). They were about people whom he knew and places that he recognized: he found himself in them, yes, in all twelve positions. They were in a sense books he had read already, all his life, and yet—and yet they were trying to do something that he wanted

to see done in a book and had certainly never seen done before; for, though he had in his last literature examination carefully refrained from answering an alternative question about a shabby philosopher called Godwin, and another about his daughter, he had certainly never read the novels of either; though he had read and enjoyed Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* as a good thriller. As far as he was concerned, and as far as the majority of Gentle Readers is concerned, the author of *Harmer John* was attempting something entirely new.

At the beginning of the last century there was indeed a definite attempt to add symbolism to the make-up of the traditive novel: and it is, I suppose, because of the similarity in the condition of the European soul and conscience before, during, and after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and its condition after the Russian Revolution and the Great War, that the experiment is now being repeated. In each case symbolism was literature's attempt to relate at one and the same time the history of an idea and the history of a human being. Turn to poetry and you have the perfect example of such an attempt in Blake's

*Mental Traveller.* But the effort which the French Revolution incited was an abortive business as far as the English novel was concerned.

One can think of several productions definitely symbolical in intention: Beckford's *Vathek,* Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon,* his daughter's *Frankenstein*—even Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer.* But the attempt, marvellously successful in the world of poetry, was unsupported by any novelist of the first rank, and as the revolutionary turmoil died down and the century settled into its stride, all interest in the symbolic hero, villain, or victim died out. It remained all very well for "poetry"—vague useful term for an art which reckons among its symbols Don Juan and Alice Fell: it was all very well, a safe couple of hundred years earlier, for Shakespeare and the stage to create Calibans and Hamlets and Fausts. It was even permissible for Shelley to point a moral and adorn a tale in his disallowed play *The Cenci,* so long as he did not get it trueborn upon the British stage (it is significant that *The Cenci* was not publicly performed until a century later when the country was in practically the same mood intensified); but the Nine-

teenth Century was a single-minded age, and its favourite art form being the novel, the novel must not lend itself to double dealing. The symbolic novel tells two stories at once: the symbolic novel uses the individual adventure to prove the eternal rule: and that was confusing to the Victorian Gentle Reader. He had plenty of intelligence; but, like Disko Troop, he liked to "keep things separate." He could enjoy Carlyle's Philosophy of Clothes, and he could appreciate Meredith's Great Mel; but a seven-at-a-blow tailor who represented all tailordom and was at the same time the *Zeitgeist* weaving the garment of God, that was—not beyond the Victorian's intelligence—but beyond his taste.

There was, of course, an occasional attempt to use the double form: Emily Brontë, for instance, is clearly feeling after it in *Wuthering Heights;* but it is scarcely a conscious gesture. It was not, at any rate, a gesture that had much interest for lesser writers of the century: unless you include the satirists, who in every century habitually use the allegory and the symbol. But Peacock's Sir Oran Haut-ton and Butler's *Erewhon* serve a very different purpose from Frankenstein's mon-

ster or Bunyan's City of Destruction. The difference between the satirist and the allegorist, or his descendant the symbolist, is the difference between Solomon Eagle stalking through plagued London, a brazier on his head, and Lady Mary introducing inoculation. The satirist is the Sword of the Lord: the symbolist is Gideon. The Lord smote; but you remember that Gideon, when the smiting was over, made from the spoils an ephod (the garment of God), and though all Israel went a-whoring after it and it became in time a snare even to Gideon and his house, the land had rest forty years.

Such ephods, such priestly garments, the symbolist must always be making to clothe his idea of fate—the life-force, deity, the eternal, the absolute, or whatever other name you choose to substitute for the worn noun God. And such ephods it is, of course, the business of the Disintegrators to destroy: and they do it with the help of the satirist, the exposer of shams, the render of garments. There are few symbolists in the history of the novel. It is at all times so much easier to expose and destroy than to create. For nothing kills so swiftly as laughter: it is the frost which nips

the creative shoots, which stills the spring song. And the apprentice-creator alone among the artists has to run the gauntlet of mockery. No one laughs at a cynic; but there is something humorous in faith: and that perhaps is why the allegorists and the symbolists so seldom use the novel form. They are safer from ridicule in the world of drama and poetry. Society is afraid of poetry, for poetry is successful faith: and drama when it deals, as it instinctively likes to do, with the failure of faith, at once becomes tragedy: and it is one of the properties of tragedy that it cannot be found ridiculous.

But the novel was best liked by the Victorian Gentle Reader when it ignored symbolism and satire, faith and failure: when it minded its own business. "And its business is," decided the Victorian reader—and he still exists, as Victorianism exists, to-day—"to tell the tale if not the fairy tale, with a laugh at my neighbour but not at me: stirring up my neighbour, but leaving me alone. 'Tell me a story of Jack-a-Manory, and now your story's begun: tell me another of Jack and his brother, and so let your story be done'!"

The Nineteenth Century writers were on the

whole pretty obedient. Save for the work of Hawthorne and such stray experiments as Bulwer's *The Coming Race,* Meredith's *Shaving of Shagpat,* Holmes's *Elsie Venner* or Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde,* the resources of symbolism were scarcely tapped. Not till our own day does this need for the double theme, the double-saucepan form, make itself felt in literary cookery.

But with the premonitions of upheaval which were beginning to make themselves felt at the time of Edward VII's death, with the war and the revolution and the after-war called the Peace of Versailles, odd, uncomfortable ideas about right and wrong, good and evil, God and devil, civilization and savagery began to affright the Gentle Reader as Job was affrighted by night upon his bed. Wordsworth's thought, if not his phrase, tormented him—*Was* Carnage also the daughter of God? How? Why? Was right always right? Was white never black? Was there anything to be said for evil? Britons never, never should be slaves! But suppose Britons were already slaves to their own idea of freedom? It was all very difficult. Why didn't writers write stories about such important

problems instead of writing about the eternal triangle? But the Gentle Reader supposed that if they did, the stuff would be above his head. He had once dipped humbly and hopefully into Joyce's *Ulysses,* and had had the fright of his life. He thought well of Mrs. Woolf's *Jacob's Room,* because it was full of beautiful, living phrases and mood-pictures. Indeed he understood each of her sentences quite well, as a sentence; and yet, try as he would, he couldn't understand what the book as a whole was about. As for Gertrude Stein, she made him cry with the Elephant's Child—"This is too buch for be!" The Gentle Reader began to wonder if it was impossible to expect any of the younger writes to write about new ideas in an old-fashioned way. The Gentle Reader sighed in fact for the traditive novel, brought up to date.

And so it is not perhaps surprising that it should be the most traditive of the middle-period moderns who satisfies this new requirement of the Reader; but it strikes one as humorous that it should be so. Innovations are to be expected from James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Mrs. Woolf, Wyndham Lewis, the Sitwells, and the rest of

the literary airplanes and gliders, but not—surely not—from that coach-and-four Hugh Walpole!

Consider his style, his structure, his choice of material! If they prove him a born story-teller, with the Victorian virtues added of readableness and the power to draw character and characters, places as objects in the landscape, and places as living entities, has he not also the Victorian faults —length, leisureliness, carelessness, with an inborn disrespect for words as words? This, of course, is in the tradition. The genuine traditive novelist has never shown the sort of respect for words that Moore, Pater, Meredith, Stevenson, or James shows; but achieves style by the happy accidental combination of a gift for story-telling with passionate sincerity. Hugh Walpole can write beautiful simple English when he chooses. Take these passages from his first and last books as examples. Here is a passage from *The Wooden Horse,* published twenty years ago:

> The perfect stillness of the scene pleased him; the world was like the breathless moment before some great event: the opening of Pandora's box, the leaping of armed men from the belly of the wooden horse, the flashing of Excalibur over the mere, the birth of a little child.

And here is a passage from *Wintersmoon,* published in 1928:

> Hignett, as the Wintersmoon clocks struck nine, stepped out of the long dining-room windows, stood on the terrace and surveyed the world.
>
> This world was glittering and shining, dew-soaked under the sun. Between the trees of the woods the light was a sparkling fire and on the long green surface of the lawns the sparks scattered from blade to blade. Birds, small and dark in the shining splendour, hopped from hunting-ground to hunting-ground. The great house spread fanwise, clear and sharp against the faint white-blue of the morning sky. Smoke curled in spirals, still, unflecked by wind, heavenward. The peacock stood at the far end of the terrace, at sight of Hignett spread his fan, then turned and strutted away, his greeting royally given.

But he can also write, when he is in a hurry or when he is particularly excited by the plot of his story, like an earnest and sentimental schoolboy. At such moments "rathers," "verys," "awfullys," "wonderfuls," and "splendids" drip comfortably and confidentially from his pen, blotting his best work, he remaining the while serenely unconscious of messiness. On the same spread of page he is capable of remarking, "the scene was wonderfully beautiful," yet following it up,

a line or two later, by living touches such as, "the sky was gray with little pools and rivers of watery blue," or, "the mouse-faced farm." And when he paints, as he constantly does, a vivid and convincing picture of some natural object and uses it then to serve some idea that he wishes to express, to illustrate a mood not easy to record directly, he constantly spoils it by some carelessness of structure. Take a sentence picked at random from the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*:

> "Do you believe in God, Mr. Harkness?" and the draught went whispering on hands and feet around the room. "Do you believe in God, Mr. Harkness?"

Was ever a sentence, perfect in its suggestion of things unwritten, unwritable, so recklessly dumped on to paper? But it is useless to protest against such criminal carelessness; because Mr. Walpole can triumphantly retort that, carelessness or no carelessness, he has contrived to etch on the brain of the reader exactly the impression which he intended to create, or the sentence would not be thus rousing me to indignation. And if the sentence does rouse and move the reader, then the unfortunate position in it of the phrase

"hands and feet" really does not matter: the writer is after the reader's heart, not his ear.

And, of course, because he is primarily a story-teller, his point of view is justifiable. If the tale and the people of the tale and the moral of the tale come first, come last, come all the time with him, that after all is what the Gentle Reader likes and requires; for the Gentle Reader's concern has always been, always will be, the tale and the people of the tale. Trollope had precisely the same colloquial, confidential, and serene disregard for words as words. Humpty Dumpty's motto is good enough for them both:

"When I use a word," said Anthony Trollope in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean: neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Hugh Walpole, "whether you can make words mean different things?"

"The question is," said Anthony Trollope, "which is to be master: that's all! They've a temper some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest. Adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot!"

And he did. One admits it gratefully. Without ever achieving a beautiful sentence, Trollope holds the reader entranced. But it is not to be denied that Trollope, with his "to tell the truth" and "the fact was," his "dids" and "nows," his "quiverfuls," his "Rerechilds," and "Filgraves," and Hugh Walpole, with his "splendids," "awfullys," and "stockys," do, like Humpty Dumphy, make some of their words work overtime.

All this, however, is perfectly in the English tradition: and Hugh Walpole, in this earthquaky age, remains as traditional as Stevenson's man of the islands who dug in his father's grave and raked forth no more than a rusty horseshoe. Yet an unborn spirit, you remember, told the man of the islands to treasure what he found—"for in my thought it is a good thing to do what our fathers did, and keep what they kept without question." And by means of the horseshoe, prosperity came to the man, and that prompting spirit was in due time born into the world as his son.

As conservative as his style but much more carefully considered is Hugh Walpole's literary architecture. His usual ground plan is the ground

plan of group life. Indeed, his whole method is rooted in the group. He uses the family community in his first novel, *The Wooden Horse:* he uses it in his latest novel, *Wintersmoon.* He uses it in eleven out of the eighteen intermediate novels in *Maradick at Forty, Fortitude, The Duchess of Wrexe, The Green Mirror,* the *Jeremy* books, *The Captives, The Young Enchanted, The Cathedral.* In two of the remaining seven he uses the nearest thing to the family group—the school community (*Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*) and the college community (*Prelude to Adventure*). One of the five other volumes is a book of short stories called *The Thirteen Travellers:* the other four are all stories based on the impact of the individual upon a community: *The Old Ladies* gives us a group of elderly women in a lodging house, dominated by one of the inmates: *The Dark Forest* is a study of a military group in Russia during the war: in *Harmer John* we see a town banded against a newcomer whom it has at first welcomed. Indeed it may be said that, except in a privately printed volume of confessions called *The Crystal Box,* Hugh Walpole has never related the history of an individual apart

from the crowd: that his individual should be related to the crowd is a condition of his story-telling, as it was a condition of all the traditive novelists before him.

Indeed, even in his mere technical approach to his story, he follows, he does not invent. A favourite opening of the traditive novel is a death in the first pages, with the consequent readjustments in the life of the principal character. One has only to think of *Pamela, The Watsons, Villette, Nicholas Nickleby,* or *Framley Parsonage,* to realize how constantly this opening is used. Hugh Walpole uses it in *Fortitude,* in *The Captives,* and in *The Cathedral.* He is still fonder of that other opening, popular since the days of *Rob Roy,* the arrival of the stranger or the return of the exile. He uses it in *The Wooden Horse, Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill, The Young Enchanted, The Cathedral, Harmer John,* and, in a very orgy of traditionalism, combines it, in the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair,* with no less than three other famous openings—the arrival of a stranger in a strange inn in a strange town in a strange country as the preliminary to arrival in a very strange family circle indeed.

These conservatisms might be elaborated endlessly. In one only of his typically traditional impulses does he in form break away from consecrated use. He becomes experimental so soon as he deals with the problem of the introduction of children into his book world. Indeed, before turning to Hugh Walpole's main contribution to the novel to-day, it may be useful to consider his minor experiment in new handling familiar material; for unless the reader convinces himself that the *Jeremy* books and *The Golden Scarecrow* are a constructive contribution to the art of the novel as well as a series of pleasant studies of childhood, he is not likely to be interested in the major experiment—the use of a whole range of novels concerning adult life for two distinct purposes at once.

## *CHAPTER VI*

A BIG and fascinating book may some day be written about the children of English literature. The average English are neither childlike nor childish: "childlike" is the epithet only earned by a very great or a very good human being: "childish" is, on the other hand, applied only to the

fool; but "boyish" and "girlish" are epithets that few mature English escape; for the English have a trick in moments of enthusiasm and excitement of falling back into adolescence. It may be as much egoistic interest in a state from which they have not completely emerged as sympathy for youth that makes the British Gentle Reader so fond of stories about boys and girls; but it is a fact that English novelists, traditive, pioneer, or eccentric, are nearly always at their best when studying adolescence. The later traditive novelists, indeed, use children as a necessity of the form (it is puzzling that Scott, of all people, should have practically done without them!); for the traditive novel is a completed world, and a world without children is unimaginable. And the pioneers in novel-writing also turn to children for use in their experiments, turn almost with passion, as if only in the child's mind were material to be found sufficiently clear and ductile for their purposes.

Indeed the traditive and pioneering novelists are in themselves rather like the adult and the child, rather like Colonel Brandon and Marianne Dashwood. In the traditive novelist are all the

virtues of maturity. He has balance, proportion, humour, sanity, comfortableness, with the business sense, the gift of selling. But he has also the faults of maturity—prosiness, priggishness, garrulity, and the fatal inclination to seek "the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat" —in other words, the happy ending at all costs! The pioneer, on the other hand, has the faults of the adolescent—exaggeration, theoric, instability, even silliness, but also a wild imagination and a hurtling energy, with passions uncontrollable.

The earliest novelists, who, of course, used children principally for the sake of the effect on their elders, had three distinct methods of coping with the intruding youngsters. They treated them sometimes as "incapable and shallow innocents." Richardson's little Miss Goodwin is handled so and is as charming and unreal as Robinetta: and Fielding follows suit in *Amelia* where the children are mere cherubic flounces on the heroine's gown. Sometimes children were treated as miniature men and women. No two people could be more ludicrously unlike each other than the pious propagandist Mrs. Sherwood, and the supersubtle vizier Disraeli, but you will find precisely

the same homunculous conception of youth in *The Fairchild Family* as in *Venetia*. And sometimes the two points of view are actually combined. Bunyan's children are innocents, packed nevertheless to the brim with the same sins, vanities, and virtues as their elders: and Goldsmith's Moses in *The Vicar of Wakefield* is first cousin to Christiana's ingenuous boys. But then Bunyan and Goldsmith are astonishingly alike in their attitude to human beings, though one was a wild and the other a civilized humanitarian: there is the same comical blood-brothership between them as between those wild and tame barbarians Tamburlaine and Louis XIV.

The earliest novelists, then, had the same methods of drawing the child as they had of drawing the grown-up person. They drew children as fixed characters, creatures of common clay differing only from their elders in lack of years, strength, and experience. It is not till the women began to write independently that the child trailed clouds of glory. However, with the complete rearrangement of material which the Nineteenth Century brought about, the child not only began to take a more important place in the novel, but

began to be considered apart from its later developments. Novelists were rediscovering, in fact, that "circles, though small, are yet complete." But once again the treatment of children fell into three groups.

The children of the pioneer seem to be nearly always incarnations of their creator: they represent parts of the writer's personality drawn to the surface and isolated there. The children in *Wuthering Heights* are a supreme example of this method. The children of the more traditive novelist are, on the other hand, nearly always "recollected" children: they are recollections either of the traditive novelist's own children or of children that he has watched: indeed when a traditive novelist conceives a child out of his own imagination he is usually as clumsy as Juno. Dickens, for instance, remembered David Copperfield triumphantly, observed Morleena Kenwigs accurately, imagined Little Nell—and failed utterly. The truth is that the most exquisite children of literature do not belong to the novelists' world at all. Lamb's Alice, Carroll's Alice, the children in *They,* Kim, the first farm of Peter Pan, Prince Arthur, Bevis, Kenneth Grahame's Harold,

Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Blake's Chimney Sweeper, are all born out of literary wedlock, are love-children, with the special qualities and traditional inheritances of the come-by-chance. And it is their quality to exist eternally as children, as circles small yet complete.

But the proper novelists, whether traditive or pioneer, generally feel themselves obliged to make their exquisite small circles expand into men and women. Even Jane Austen has fallen into that trap in *Mansfield Park:* and Fanny, in consequence, is the least convincing of Jane Austen's children: and Jane Austen had a genius for drawing children! Charles, sitting up late at the ball, is surely one of the most adorable children in or out of any book:

> "What o'clock is it?"
>
> "Eleven."
>
> "Eleven! and I am not at all sleepy. Mamma said I should be asleep before ten. . . . When shall you come to Osbourne Castle? . . . There is a monstrous curious stuffed fox there, and a badger, anybody would think they were alive. It is a pity you should not see them."

To meet another child so gay, so real, so boyish, so beautifully mannered, one must turn to Meredith, who ought, of course, in a properly

timed world, to have married Jane Austen. He would have been the perfect husband for her. How he would have helped her with Jane Fairfax: and what a difference she would have made to the portrait of Mrs. Con! For these two geniuses, with half a century between them, always seem to me curiously akin, not in manner, but in their critical enjoyment of life: they are the male and female of civilized English wit. Compare Emma Watson dancing with Charles, and Clara Middleton playing with Crossjay in *The Egoist*. It is the same scene, drawn in turn by a sparkling young she-genius with gunpowder running out of the heels of her boots, and a master slowing into his prime. Little Charles Blake and Crossjay might either have developed into the Irish boy who turns *Celt and Saxon* into the most tantalizing of fragments. But Jane Austen is far too wise to let her children grow up as a rule: and Fanny is of all her heroines the least convincing, just because Fanny's childhood is drawn from the inside, an imaginative preliminary to the life of the grown woman. Fanny's cousins, who are merely observed, are brutally alive, alive as the small boy who clambers on

Anne's back in *Persuasion;* but Fanny is from the start a little woman, and a woman imagined rather than known: like Charlotte Brontë's small Jane Eyre, she was never truly a child—not even a dream child.

One of the reasons, I have always thought, for Charlotte Brontë's lack of sympathy with Jane Austen lay in the fact that Jane Austen never attempted the dream child. There was no need. It is so obvious that Jane Austen's childhood must have been a normal, healthy, and very happy one—the delightful sketch of Catherine's emergence into young ladyhood has a comical, reminiscent air:

> She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket, not merely to dolls but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary bird, or watering a rose-bush. . . . She shirked her lessons . . . whenever she could . . . she was, moreover, noisy and wild, hated confinement, cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house.

That description rings as personally true as Charlotte's portrait of Jane Eyre at Lowood, or Mrs. Gaskell's confirmatory picture of the par-

sonage infants reading the newspaper to each other. What need was there for Jane Austen to conceive a compensating dream child? But Charlotte had bitter need to conceive a little Polly! Polly Home in *Villette* is the "small circle" of Charlotte's own soul. She should have been left so; for Paulina de Bassompiere, whom she is supposed to become, could never have been Charlotte, and so the character breaks in two. Charlotte loved Helen and Jane and Polly too much, just as she hated Eliza and John Reed too much for them to be entirely plausible: they are to a certain extent her own passions of love and hate externalized. Indeed, the only completely convincing *human* child in Charlotte Brontë's gallery is Adele, who is drawn from observation, not imagined from within, and whose further development, you will remember, we are not allowed to see.

No, the perfect children, whether dreamed, observed, or recollected, do not grow up. Maggie Tulliver survives the transition: and so do David and Pip; but we mourn for little Polly, for Tom Brown irritatingly at Oxford, for Grace Crawley, even for Em'ly, and refuse to admit that the

charming wood-god of *In the Rukh* has any real connection with Mowgli of the *Jungle Books.*

It seems fairly clear that among the moderns Hugh Walpole has been a special mourner for these vanished childhoods; for though he is far too confirmed a lover of tradition to omit so typical a feature of the English novel in his own books, he carefully avoids this special problem of the traditive novelist by using children in a new way. His interest in them does not lead him to join forces with the children's novelists and to write books for children: he does not make occasional and exceptional ventures like *Kim* or *Cubwood* or *Bevis:* nor does he follow Charlotte Yonge and Miss Alcott in their incomparable inter-relations of the two planes, the adolescent and the mature: instead he confines children to a world of their own. He first sets spinning in the skies of his imagination his adult world, and then allows to revolve near it a second smaller world, a moon to his earth. (And this smaller world has in turn its own satellite! As gravely and intelligently as the history of Jeremy is related also in its own special chapters the history of Jeremy's dog!)

In these lesser worlds of childhood Hugh Walpole works out practically the same problems of character and environment as he does in his major world. He presents the same types, but in earlier stages of development: and he replaces the necessary frieze of external events, events which mould the adult—such as travelling, encounter with the herd the sight of men and cities, passions, money problems, art—by a frieze of elders. The lives of these children of the "little" novels are walled in by their parents, governors, pastors, and masters, and they move in a much more restricted space; but otherwise this chronicle of a derived world is written with precisely the same care, gravity, and respect for its subject matter as is used in the larger series. There is no softening of outline, no prettifying, and above all no writing down. Exactly the same methods, carefully dwarfed, are employed. There is even a simplified use of symbolism.

This adaptation of the traditive novel to the scale of childhood and the running of such an experiment concurrently with a major series of adult romances is practically a new departure in novel writing. Richard Jeffries, of course, in

*Wood Magic* and in *Bevis* may have given Mr. Walpole a hint. *Bevis* is a much more comprehensive study of boyhood than are any of the *Jeremy* books. *The Golden Scarecrow,* on the other hand, if it is more sentimental, shows a clearer understanding of babyhood than *Wood Magic.* It is equally fantastic, but it is much more convincing. But Jeffries was, heaven knows, no traditive novelist, hard as he tried to be one. He has not even a place among the pioneers; for it may be said that Jeffries did not know enough about novel-making, as distinct from writing, to be a pioneer. His books are not conscious experiments, wildly original though they be. He wrote as he found: he lived in an undiscovered country and welcomed the pioneers when they arrived from over seas. But you cannot be a Columbus when you live in America! *After London* and *Amaryllis at the Fair* are great art, but they are not from any point of view successful novels, any more than those quaint melodramatic efforts, *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Restless Human Hearts,* are novels. Nor does the *Bevis* series bear any relation to these adult tales: nor is it in itself a "little" novel. It is a picaresque romance the hero of

which happens to be a child: it should be compared with *Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer,* and *Kim,* rather than with the *Jeremy* books, which aim at an altogether different effect. The whole point of Hugh Walpole's effects lies in the fact that the *Jeremy* stories are supplementary, not independent, that they shed light—moonlight—on the larger world about which they revolve. And though the books are delightful for their own sake, it is unquestionable that the series would interest the reader less if it were not for this consciousness of the looming elder world, if, that is to say, the *Jeremy* saga were not related so closely in feeling, matter, and manner to Hugh Walpole's major novels. It is this close relationship that makes the experiment worth while and, it may be added, so extremely amusing. For it is amusing to reflect on Hugh Walpole's complete deception of the critic in search of novelty.

Invent an unintelligible or infantine manner: break all moulds of form: print sentences in the present tense without commas, with plenty of dots, dashes, and blank spaces: indulge in a combination of the typographical eccentricities of Laurence Sterne and Anita Loos: and the writer

may be as derivative as he pleases in the contents of his novels, and still be hailed a pioneer. But a novelist whose form is traditive may make two very remarkable and prolonged experiments in the manipulation of the actual contents of a novel, without receiving any recognition of the achievement, so long as he is content with the traditive manner. And Hugh Walpole is content. He uses the old form quite definitely and consciously as an umbrella. Critics seldom stoop to look under an umbrella. In its grateful shade a writer can make experiments in peace and quiet, which is the one desire of most experimenters.

But if we look under the umbrella we at once discover that it hides novelties. Let us examine the simplest of the experiments, the novels about children. Hugh Walpole's "little novels" began with *The Golden Scarecrow,* a series of independent studies of children from babyhood to the age of twelve. His favourite use of symbolism was seen in the strange and beautiful central character, the only one common to all the tales, of the children's Friend. The baby, half blind and groping in a monstrous new state of life, clings desperately to the Somebody who has accompanied it into this

world from some already forgotten earlier one. The Somebody, the Friend, is drawn as a shadowy male figure, half Christ, half Santa Claus, part Conscience, part Pan. The figure is, however, as vividly alive as the little humans, so much so that its gradual withdrawal from the sight and the consciousness of the children as their mundane shells harden about them actually gives the reader also a curious and painful sense of loss. The whole series of tales is in fact a restatement in terms of the novel of certain passages in "Intimations of Immortality," for whatever Hugh Walpole's technical ancestry may be, spiritually he derives from Wordsworth via Hawthorne.

*The Golden Scarecrow* was followed by a book about a small boy called Jeremy: and *Jeremy* has been followed by *Jeremy and Hamlet* and *Jeremy at Crale.* It is hardly necessary to give a detailed synopsis of the *Jeremy* saga. It is obvious that the main difference between a chronicle of childhood and one of maturity lies in the fact that in the former there can be no dramatic plot. The natural second act, marriage or the equivalent, is missing: and the third act, except for the *Paul Dombeys,* has no significance because it has

no finality. A novel of childhood can be no more than a prologue, soon over or indefinitely prolonged according to the writer's belief in the importance of every incident belonging to the first ten years. But though an actual plot is absent from *Jeremy,* his story has plenty of plots. Remembering that a child's day is often an adult's year, Hugh Walpole has designed each chapter to cover a stage in the protracted pilgrimage of childhood: each chapter is, in fact, a novel in miniature. In each Jeremy has his violent new experience and leaves it behind him as his elders leave at last behind them an agony of months. The *Jeremy* volumes, in consequence, though they are not closely written, do reproduce with extreme reality the agitated lengthiness of childhood, which resembles nothing so much as a concertina stretched out full. Now the usual type of child's book with its arbitrary climax and conclusion is much more like a concertina shut up: and a concertina shut up is not in the least like a concertina. But the book has very much more than mere technical and experimental interest for the reader. The children are worth meeting for their own

sake. Jeremy, Mary, Helen, and the rest are drawn from the inside, and are imagined rather than recollected children, though it is clear from the resemblance between the child books and the various groups of the adult novels that recollection even more than observation plays a part in rounding these small circles. But the children are imagined from the point of view of the elder, the masculine novelists. They are all fixed characters acting on life and each other, and acted upon by life and each other. They are not new-formed every morning by their own emotions. Even the character of Hamlet the dog is fixed and unalterable, from his introduction, that snowy winter afternoon, to the Cole hearth, to his epic fight with Mephisto the poodle: and the best of the dog stories, the story of Hamlet's apostasy and repentance, does not develop the absurd creature's character, it merely exhibits it.

This concentration of children in camps is not only interesting as an experiment in the use of the traditive novel: it is interesting in its effect on a writer's more important novels. This general exclusion of children from the novel of adult life

gives their exceptional use in such a novel a significance perhaps unduly puzzling. It at any rate emphasizes the sterility of the civilization that Hugh Walpole is principally occupied in depicting. It does show to the reader how small a part childhood plays in the life of the average occupied or idle adult.

Hugh Walpole's novels purport to give a picture of life in the upper and middle classes during the last thirty years—there are some fifteen of them (short stories and the *Jeremy* series apart). These are their names in chronological order:

*The Wooden Horse*
*Maradick at Forty*
*Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*
*Prelude to Adventure*
*Fortitude*
*The Duchess of Wrexe*
*The Green Mirror*
*The Dark Forest*
*The Secret City*
*The Captives*
*The Young Enchanted*
*The Cathedral*

*The Old Ladies*
*Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*
*Harmer John*
*Wintersmoon*

Now only three times in all these stories does a child considered as a child appear, always excepting the frieze of schoolboys in *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* (Garden Minimus is inevitable in the story of a schoolmaster). The other children are treated in the Jane Eyre–Fanny Price manner. Rachel Seddons's childhood, like her son's childhood, is but suggested, and though we first meet Peter Westcott (of *Fortitude*) at the age of twelve, his adventures are but preliminary to his adult life. Later indeed his own child's little life and death become the instrument of his own development: and here we do get a circle, small yet complete. Mr. Walpole has a curious trick of returning to his early themes, using them again in practically the same form but with the full weight of his knowledge and experience of life and letters behind him. He did this with the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*—which is practically *Maradick at Forty* perfected—with

*The Wooden Horse* and *The Green Mirror,* with the character of Maggie and the character of Janet: he has done it perhaps most exactly in his recent elaboration of the life story of Peter Westcott's child into the story of Humphrey's life and death in *Wintersmoon.* Indeed the final chapter—it contains but three sentences—which sums up that little life, is not easy to forget:

> Young Humphrey died at ten minutes past four this Eleventh of April——
>
> Mrs. Beddoes spoke the right word to Hawes:
>
> "Barring my sister-in-law's youngest, 'e was the jolliest kid I ever did see."

It is the fashion to label "sentimental" any simple expression of simple emotion. I have heard it said by a brother novelist of this very study of a child's life and death, that Humphrey's small venture into life and out again was a valueless ebullition of sentimentality. The reader knew from the start that the child was there for a purpose, a reconciling purpose: and that his death at a certain point in the tale was necessary to the achievement of that purpose—"As soon as I read about him I knew that he died before the book was fin-

ished, or what would have happened to Walpole's plot?"

I knew it too. Any reader reading intelligently and sympathetically would have known it; but known also that to rear children and to lose children are not rare, extraordinary events, but common ones, known to the majority, marking ineffaceably the souls that have known such events, such joys and griefs. Because these overwhelming experiences are common ones, are they to be denied a writer as material? Because in real life the birth or death of a child does so constantly (to use the common, beautiful phrase) draw people together, is the writer whose object is the drawing and explaining of life to be forbidden to use such an imaginary child for a reconciling purpose in his invented story? If the reader believes in any God at all, any Will, Purpose, Thought, Providence, Artist, Controller, Renewer—whatever name he gives him—he must believe also that his god interweaves lives, cuts or mends the thread, tangles, renews, or severs for a purpose or furtherance of a plan: and if occasionally a fraction of the plan, an inkling of the purpose, becomes for a

wild moment clear to the reader, does he call his creator sentimental?

Now as we are to our gods so the people of his book are to the writer. Whether John Milton writes or John o' Dreams, Will Shakespeare or Will o' Wisp—while they write they are creators, shaping worlds: and we should concede them, as far as their work is concerned, the omnipotence and the omniscience of deity, even though when we see on the seventh day the completed whole we do not call it good: and we have no right to call any writer sentimental because in dealing with his own world he is as arbitrary and purposeful as Providence with us: we have no right as critics to cavil at a writer's aims. A critic's only business is to ask—"Has the writer achieved his aims?" As soon as a critic criticizes the aims themselves he become a humanist criticizing the writer as a fellow creature, not as a creator. Sentiment is always constructive in its effect: sentimentality is merely decorative. The critic can assail Mr. Walpole for obliterating his small Humphrey on the ground that he, the critic, does not like reading about children dying, and that he thinks that the man who writes about children dying is no

better than Herod; but this is the attack of one human being on another human being, not the attack of critic or writer. The world of *Wintersmoon* requires the death of little Humphrey, just as the world of Bly requires the death of Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*. But the world of *The Old Curiosity Shop* did not require the death of Little Nell, and so her death instantly becomes an unnecessary, artificial, and revolting exploitation of the Gentle Reader's sense of pity: that is to say, it becomes a decoration, a sentimentality.

Hugh Walpole is often accused of sentimentality because it becomes necessary to his scheme for him to draw sentimental people. But any careful reader soon becomes aware that these innumerable sentimentalists are not affectionately smudged on to paper, but exceedingly carefully, even cruelly drawn. The smudginess is never accidental: and Walpole's keen sympathy, his curiously keen sympathy with his woolly bleaters, never persuades him into omitting one shearing and shaming stroke. He has never drawn a more pathetic and dreadful portrait of a human being in search of self-respect than his Bunning in the *Prelude to Adventure*. Bunning is Jack Brimble-

combe of *Westward Ho!* set in a sillier age. His relation to the group of undergraduates and the hero, Olva Dune, exactly resembles the relations between poor Jack the schoolmaster's son, "in person exceedingly like a pig," and the noble brotherhood of the Rose and of Frank Leigh. Jack Brimblecombe, in the eyes of the young gentlemen, is "a trencher-scraping spaniel" to be kicked or ragged as the humour takes them: and Bunning suffers the same fate; yet, like ridiculous Jack Brimblecombe, is capable of ungainly, upsetting heroism when danger threatens what he loves. The writer, it is clear, has the same affection for his Bunning that Kingsley had for Jack, but much less faith in him!—" a most dangerous thing, this devotion of a fool!"—and without mercy he exhibits him, contrasted with the irritated and pitying Olva.

He sat down and gazed at Olva with the eyes of a devoted dog. Olva looked at him. Over Bunning's red wrists the brown ends of a Jaeger vest protruded from under the shirt.

"I say, why don't you dress properly?"

"I don't know——" began Bunning.

"Well, the sleeves of your vest needn't come down like that. It looks horribly dirty. Turn 'em up!"

Bunning, blushing almost to tears, turned them back.

"There's no need to make yourself worse than you are, you know. . . . Why do you come here? I'm always beastly to you."

"As long as you let me come—I don't mind how beastly you are."

"But what do you get from it?"

"Everything. . . . I've always watched you. I used to look at you in chapel. You're just as different from me as anyone can be, and that's why you're like a god to me. I think I'd rather you weren't. But I like to come in sometimes and hear you say that I'm dirty and untidy. That shows you've noticed."

"But I'm not at all the sort of person to make a hero of," said Olva hurriedly. "I don't want you to feel like that about me. . . . You must stand on your own legs."

"I never have," said Bunning very solemnly, "and I never will. I've always had somebody to make a hero of. I would love to die for you. I would really."

Now this is a perfectly true, recognizable portrait of a not uncommon type; but it is also a very cruel portrait. That "really" is a quite devilish stroke of observation: as devilish as an Austenism, and much more barbarous because the stage is not set for comedy in *Prelude to Adventure.* It is perhaps, in its cruelty, the measure of Hugh Walpole's dislike, even fear, of the particular weakness that he draws. It is a weakness that

haunts him, and he does, in consequence, people his world with an undue proportion of sentimentalists; but never, as I read him, without being conscious that he does so, and always with the conviction that any reflection of the real world must be a reflection of a world of sentimentalists. Indeed, one of the points that he labours in the whole series of novels of the first period is that sentimentality, and its opposite, the enjoyment of cruelty, is an ever-present danger to the soul. Better be sentimental than cruel, certainly, but either way, know yourself damned!

And in this careful analysis of the effect of a child on its father, its mother, and its friends, this perfectly natural use of the perfectly natural emotions that the life and ways, the mere "being," of a child rouses in normal people—in the use of all this for the purposes of his story, he seems to be deliberately defying the accusation of sentimentality. It is as if he said:

"Every normal human being needs sentiment, feels sentiment, gives out sentiment. Every normal being also hates being misunderstood and laughed at: and the easiest way to laugh at any person is to call their expression of sentiment

(which is true feeling) sentimentality (which is manufactured feeling). But the person who is afraid to feel sentiment or show sentiment for fear it should be mistaken for sentimentality is the greatest sentimentalist of all, for he is substituting for natural expression of feeling, artificial repression of feeling: and such a sentimentalist I, for one, will not be!"

## *CHAPTER VII*

READERS will agree that it is one thing to like a book, and another and a much harder thing to explain why they like it. In fact they will probably admit that no sooner do they begin to give reasons why they like it than they find their reasons merely convince the listener

that he, at any rate, wouldn't like it. It is a common and irritating experience to be thus convicted of enthusiasm, but it is easily explained. An experienced reader, detecting in the first pages of a new book the quality in the writer which appeals to him, very properly shuts his eyes, while he reads, to the book's faults. He wants to be fed, not disgusted. He behaves, in fact, exactly as an experienced playgoer behaves when he goes to see a great actress. He deliberately ignores the inevitable mannerisms and idiosyncrasies for the sake of the vitality and beauty of the performance as a whole. The great actress has something precious to give him, something that no one but herself in the whole universe possesses; that is—her own personality! With this she recreates her text. What does it matter if, with the perfect bloom, a few lesser buds, a shrivelled sepal or two, and unnecessary leaves are also presented? Such things can and must be ignored, or the listener loses through a superficial irritation that which the artist has to give. And if the artist has much to give it can happen that the listener not merely ceases to mind the mannerisms but begins to like them. They

actually add, because they act as contrast, to the beauty which he has come to enjoy.

The same thing happens to the reader of a great man with a manner. Once you are caught by your Meredith do you complain of obscurity? Not you! You don't wish one complication of style away. They are the roughage of the man's art. In short, so long as the faults are the deliberate faults of a veteran who knows what he is doing, not the uncertainties of a beginner who sins through ignorance, the reader is happy—as a reader! His trouble begins when he turns interpreter. Then, oddly, instantly, his attitude changes. In his anxiety to prove himself an impartial judge and so convince the listener of the book's real quality, he usually begins by retailing the faults which (he would have said!) had hitherto escaped his observation. Indeed he often becomes so absorbed in analysis of the faults that further enthusiasm evaporates altogether, and he finds himself a self-convicted gull. This fact accounts, I think, for the tendency of critics in every generation to belittle the literature of their own time. If the Reader feels so strongly the difference between enjoying and accounting for enjoyment, how

much more strongly must the critic feel it in reviewing the work of a writer as a whole!

For this queer instinct for picking holes is strengthened by the form which fair criticism has to take. To get a clear view of a writer's aim and achievement, the critic must begin at the beginning, with the works of the apprentice, not with the works of the master craftsman. Reading a mature writer's early books, always excepting the first, is like getting a glimpse, not of a play, but of a property master's workshop. Here are to be found all his toys in the making—his animals, his interiors, his outdoor scenes, his flowers and fruits and landscapes, his lightings and stage effects. His actual actors, too, are in all stages of life and half-life, some mere cardboard, some living to the waist and marble to the feet like the King of the Ebony Isles, some headless, some mere torsos: while one or two are probably already so drunk with the master's Elixir Vitæ that they turn on him like Frankenstein's monster and wreck his world for him. Yet out of these puppets, half made, ill considered, unjudged, the living creatures develop that make a man's work great. But they are not characters in search of

their author. It is the author who plays blind-man's buff with them, the bandage of inexperience over his eyes.

Hugh Walpole's inevitable workshop novel is *Maradick at Forty,* his second book. His first book, *The Wooden Horse,* is much better written, is a rounder thing; but it is a lesser thing: one of those deceptively mature first novels, the king blackberry of a cluster that has ripened long before the rest of the berries have lost their tight summer redness. But the best blackberries ripen much later in the year. Most writers who are to make their mark in literature begin with such a first novel, and the second novel is generally larger, looser, far less expert. That second novel is invariably a disappointment to the reader, who is concerned only with the results and does not pause to consider how much more the author is attempting in his second venture than he dared to attempt in his first.

But *The Wooden Horse,* though it is less significant than *Maradick,* is interesting, first because it is an extremely good story, with one scene in it—the scene between the father and son at the end of the book—that the author, in idea,

has never bettered, and second because it is the first of the family plots which Hugh Walpole later uses so frequently: and because in the title and indeed throughout the story we have hints of that use of symbolism which is Hugh Walpole's real contribution to the novel of our day, and which has become a part of his manner and his matter.

Perhaps only a very youthful writer would have taken so venerable and familiar a title for his story of the tragi-comic rout of a county family, or given them the actual name of Trojan: especially as the heroine, Mary Bethel, is scarcely a Helen, though Clare Trojan is sufficiently a Cassandra. Hugh Walpole, indeed, has never drawn a Helen, and I do not think that he ever will. He has not drawn even a half-hearted modern equivalent, a Doña Rita or an Irene Forsyte. His symbolic figure of beauty is always male. His capacity to draw certain feminine types is great—no one since Trollope died has drawn so convincingly the mind and emotions of the average woman—but he cannot draw the exceptional, the fatal woman, any more than

Trollope could: he invariably turns Venus into Ceres.

Mary Bethel is the first of his fine, kindly, charmless mother girls. She lives with a Bohemian father and an eccentric mother in a little town by the sea, which is gradually sprouting up into a typical south-coast watering place, blatant and soulless. The last stronghold of the place's dying spirit is Cullin's Cove with its fisher folk and its tumbledown ancient cottages. But the progressives of the town are trying to re-road and sanitize and lodging-house the Cove out of existence. The people of the Cove fight against the changes; but of the gentry only the Bethels, though comparative newcomers, have completely absorbed the spirit of the Cove. They have, however, absorbed other aspects of that spirit also; for Hugh Walpole is careful to represent, through Mrs. Bethel, the futility and pettiness of the old order and the harm it could do to a conventional well-meaning soul. He implies that "progress," blatant, material progress, is the special need of the conventional, their chance of development and escape. For them it is salvation, not destruction: hence their utter hostility to the type of soul

which finds in contemplation of the past its satisfactions and inspirations. In Bethel himself he is careful to show the weakness of that type also, and the cowardice which can underly the romantic view of life. Bethel represents the beauty of the Cove certainly, but also its obstinate refusal to recognize the need of every age to develop on its own lines: Bethel, like the Cove, wants to escape from responsibility into the past. But in the daughter, Mary, the true nobility of the beautiful dying place is manifest. She stands for the spirit that cannot be destroyed though its temporary habitation, the Cove itself, must go. Thus the Bethels in their tumbledown lodgings become the human symbols of certain ways of looking at life. On the other side stands the town backed by the Trojans: and here, perhaps, Mr. Walpole's psychology is a little at fault; for it is difficult to believe that the old family would not have had an instinctive sympathy for the Cove and the old order. But he does not see their spirit thus. He represents the Trojans as concerned merely for the preservation of their own order, their own conservatisms, their own position. They do not care what happens to the

spirit of the town so long as their own spirit continues to dominate it, much as the House of the Flutes, their family seat, outwardly dominates the actual buildings of the town.

> The house is astonishingly beautiful, seen from any point of view. Added to from time to time, it has that air of surprise, as of a building containing endless secrets, only some of which it intends to reveal. . . .
>
> Part of its beauty is undoubtedly owing to its superb position. It rises from the rock, over the gray town at its feet, like a protecting deity, its two towers to west and east raised like giant hands, its gray walls rising sheer from the steep shelving rock; behind it the gentle rise of hills, bending toward the inland valleys; in front of it an unbroken stretch of sea.

The Trojans suit their house. They are one of these as-it-was-in-the-beginning-is-now-and-ever-shall-be families whom English novelists have always delighted to draw. This particular race is self-centred, cold, tenacious, believing itself strong because it is unattacked. At its head is Sir Jeremy Trojan, an old man soon to die. With him lives his younger son, Garrett, his daughter Clare, and his grandson Robin. Garrett is one of the selfish ne'er-do-weels whom Hugh Walpole so constantly draws, and the house and the

family are actually run, and run efficiently, by Clare, who is capable of but two emotions, her passion for the family dignity and her passion for Robin, whom she has reared and trained.

Robin is the son of the heir, Harry, who has long since broken away from the family and its ways, and sought and found a fortune in Australia. Perhaps the surest sign of the book's immaturity is to be found in Harry's attitude to his son. It is stated by the author that "the central fact of his existence has always been his son!" but the boy is sent home from New Zealand at the age of two: and for eighteen years Harry makes no effort to see him. For, of course, the boy is not the central fact—the boy is a pipe-dream. If the son had really been the central fact of Harry's existence, he would have either kept the child with him or so engineered his life that he was in constant touch with him. That is how a real father would behave. But a sentimentalist would talk of "advantages" and "not standing in the boy's light" and so forth, and shift the responsibility for the child on to other people, precisely as Harry did: would tell himself for twenty years that he is "the centre of his exist-

ence!" (as Harry did) and come home finally full of facile affection and be deeply hurt when he gets no response (like Harry Trojan!). So far the character-scheming is excellent—it is a theme for Meredith—but the author was too inexperienced to take advantage of the situation. He believed, did that young Mr. Walpole, in his Harry's belief that Robin was the centre of Harry's existence. Thus he weakens, though he does not spoil, the fine development of the tale —the awakening of real (as opposed to sentimental) affection in the father for the son: his assumption of responsibility, and his final conquest of his son's heart. Mr. Walpole so constantly rehandles a former theme that it is to be wished that he would do for *The Wooden Horse* what he did for Maradick in the *Man with Red Hair*.

The actual plot of the story runs thus: Harry Trojan, after nearly twenty years' absence, returns home (the familiar traditive opening). His father has summoned him and his family formally welcomes him. But he finds them in reality entrenched against him. He is the Wooden Horse, and they view him with suspicion; though

how dangerous he is to the old order they are too self-sufficient to recognize. They intend him to return on their terms. If he does not know his place in the Trojan ménage then he must be taught his place.

Harry Trojan who, like Jean Paul's hero, "loves every dog and wants every dog to love him," suffers cruelly in this atmosphere. His overtures to his boy are rejected: his sister snubs him: the town, following the lead of the family, regards him as an outsider. Only the Cove welcomes him, the Cove and the Bethels. With these strangers he is happy and himself: in their company he finds friendship and affection, and in the end love. Meanwhile he watches, with the hungry affection of a father, the struggles of his son to adjust himself to the situation. Robin disapproves his father and shows it. Yet in the end it is his father to whom he turns for help.

For Robin has his own troubles. In his university days he has made the acquaintance of a girl rather older than himself, and become engaged to her. But when she and her impossible mother come to live at Pendragon, Robin realizes that in the Trojan world his Dahlia is as unsuitable

as her name. "Frankly," says Robin the snob, "she won't do!" He breaks with her but, with all his youthful sensibilities intensified by the conditions of his life, he is terrified that his affair with her should be discovered. It has been a harmless enough affair, but he is too young and too egotistical to realize it. He has written her long, long letters full of long, long thoughts. She refuses to return them. Instantly he has visions of a breach-of-promise case and himself a public laughing stock. He goes to his aunt and uncle and each promises help: the uncle because he welcomes an opportunity of self-assertion, the aunt not only because she adores the boy but because she dreads and has always dreaded the influence of the father. She thinks that Harry will inevitably take from her this one creature in the world whom she truly loves, or thinks she truly loves, for her affection is as selfish as it is intense.

She and her brother go in turn to interview the girl, are in turn routed and have to confess their defeat to the expectant Robin. Meanwhile the relations between the family and the returned Harry Trojan have become more and more strained, and have ended in a complete breach.

They have attacked him without mercy, have animadverted upon his habits, his ways, his manners, and the company he keeps. The attack has been good for his character. It has sloughed off the sentimentality which is his easy sin, has roused him to self-assertion and self-protection. He has resented intensely the attack, has shown it, and the situation has become so strained that, except for formal courtesy, there is no intercourse between him and his family although they are living in the same house. But at this point the problem of the return of the letters becomes so acute that the boy, despairing of help from his uncle and aunt, in terror of the disgrace which he sees looming over him, is forced to ask himself—can his father help? And he finally persuades his aunt that it will be possible, indeed that it is necessary, to turn to his father for advice. In much confusion the family does so; for Sir Jeremy has died, and Harry is now, whether they like it or not, head of the house. Harry, still cool, deliberately aloof, very sore at heart, at the same time amused, seeing victory in his grasp, consents, after telling the boy what he thinks of him, to help. It is really easy for him, for he has secretly made the ac-

quaintance of the girl, has thrashed out the whole matter with her and secured the return of the letters, which are already in his hands when the boy makes his appeal. Meantime the Wooden Horse has made as big a breach in the boy's conceit as it has in the family dignity. Robin sees himself: does not like what he sees. He thinks over the situation and ends by coming to his father with an apology:

Would Robin come? It was quarter to seven and that terrible sleep was beginning to overcome him again. The fire, the walls, the pictures, danced before his eyes . . . the stories of the fishermen in the Cove came back to him . . . the Four Stones and the man who had lost his way . . . the red tiles and the black rafters of "The Bended Thumb" . . . and then Mary's beauty above it all. Mary on the moors with the wind blowing through her hair; Mary in the house with the firelight on her face, Mary . . . and then he suddenly started up, wide awake, for he heard steps on the stair.

He knew them at once—he never doubted that they were Robin's. The last two steps were taken slowly and with hesitation.

Then he hurried down the passage as though he had suddenly made up his mind; then, again, there was a long pause before the door. At last came the knock, timidly, and then another loudly and almost violently.

Harry shouted "Come in," and Robin entered, his face pale and his hands twisting and untwisting.

"Ah, Robin—do you want anything? Come in—sit down. I've been asleep."

"Oh, I'm sorry, did I wake you up? No, thanks, I won't sit down. I've got some things I want to say. . . . It is about what my aunt said to you this morning—and other things. . . . I've been thinking about it all lately, but what made me come and speak to you was this morning—having to ask you a favour after being so rude to you." . . .

"I wish," said Harry quietly, "that you would sit down. I'm sure that you would find it easier to talk."

Robin looked at him for a moment and then at the chair —then he sat down.

"You see, howehow grandfather's dying has made things seem different to one—it has made one younger somehow. . . . There have been a lot of things all happening together—your coming back, that business with Dahlia—a dressing down that I got from Miss Bethel the other evening, and then grandfather's dying. . . . Unless I tell you everything from the beginning it will never be clear —I must tell you everything——"

"Please—I want to hear."

"Well, you see, before you came back, I suppose that I had really lots of side. I never used to think that I had, but I see now that what Mary said the other night was perfectly right—it wasn't only that I 'sided' about myself, but about my set and my people and everything. And then you came back. You see we didn't any of us very much think that we wanted you. . . . And then you know you made things worse by trying to force my liking out of me." . . .

"Yes," said Harry, "I know."

"But all this isn't an excuse really; I was a most awful

cad, and there's no getting away from it. . . . And then I began to get in a fright about Miss Feverel. She wouldn't give my letters back, although I went to her and Uncle Garrett and Aunt Clare—all of us—but it was no good —she meant to keep them and of course we knew why. And then, too, I saw at last that I'd behaved like an utter cad—it was funny I didn't see it at the time. . . . So, then, I began to wonder whether you could do anything, and as soon as I began to wonder that I began to want to talk to you. But I never got much chance; you were always in grandfather's room, and you didn't give me much encouragement, did you? And then—I began to be awfully miserable. . . . Then I wanted to talk to you awfully, and when grandfather was worse and was dying I began to see things straight—and then I saw Mary and she told me right out what I was, and I saw it all as clear as daylight.

"And so; well, I've come—not to ask you to help me about Dahlia—but whether you'll help me to play the game better. I wasn't always slack and rotten like I am now. When I was in Germany I thought I was going to do all sorts of things . . . but anyhow I can't say exactly all that I mean. Only I'm awfully lonely and terribly ashamed; and I want you to forgive me for being so beastly to you——"

He looked wretched enough as he sat there facing the fire with his lip quivering. He made a strong effort to control himself, but in a moment he had broken down altogether and hid his head in the arm of the chair, sobbing as if his heart would break.

Harry waited. The moment for which he had longed so passionately had come at last; all those weary weeks had now received their reward. But he was very tired and he

could not remember anything except that his boy was there and that he was crying and wanted some one to help him. . . .

"Robin, old boy—don't; it's all right really. I've been waiting for you to come and speak to me; of course, I knew that you would come—we're going to have a splendid time, you and I."

He put his arm round him. There was a moment's silence, then the boy turned round and gripped his father's coat —then he buried his head in his father's knees.

With that surrender Troy falls. Robin, forced into a choice of living with his father or his aunt, chooses to live with his father. Clare Trojan, and all that she represents, leaves the House of the Flutes for ever, and Mary Bethel fills her empty place.

## *CHAPTER VIII*

THE scene of Robin's surrender—it is the scene toward which the whole book climbs—has a double interest. It is a successful scene because it combines freshness of treatment with a point of view unusual in a young writer, and because this success is entirely a success of matter and not at all

of manner, which is more unusual still; for this is an age which seems, creatively and critically, to put manner before matter and style before sense. It does, at any rate, appear to regard style as a learnable mannerism and to disregard the traditional view that the style is the man. As for regarding the story as the only thing worth considering, that is a point of view unthinkable to the modern æsthete: which partly accounts for the fact that the average Gentle Reader reads twenty shockers for one well-written book. He is, in fact, the modern representative of the Gentle Reader approved by Jane Austen: for "novel" read "shocker" and the situation has hardly changed in a hundred years:

> If a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt and shut themselves up to read novels together. Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom, so common with novel writers, of degrading, by their contemptuous censure, the very performances to the number of which they are themselves adding: joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the

heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. . . . "I am no novel reader; I seldom look into novels; do not imagine that *I* often read novels; it is really very well for a novel." Such is the common cant.

To find Jane Austen defending the Philistine is as natural as it is comforting—that woman had mighty common sense! But to find, in our own day, Flecker, of all people in the round world, backing her up is still more refreshing. Hear him languidly in defence of his hero:

The egregious bad taste of this young man was almost certainly the outcome of his low antecedents. Stale romanticism is embedded in the poorer classes. He liked his literature garish and vivid, and with his insistent passion for all the decadent stuff that used to be in favour ten or twelve years ago, he could never appreciate that really noble modern literature, much of it dramatic, which tackles so fearlessly and with such psychological insight the problems of our industrial age. In fact, he used to say that it might be

damned good, but it was damned boring. Such is the obtuseness of the Philistine.

Which proves, if it needed proving, that Flecker was a traditive at heart. Only the traditives to-day really understand the Gentle Reader's wants or that to call him Philistine is really to call oneself fool. Give the reader a *Constant Nymph,* a *Wintersmoon,* a *Sard Harker,* a *Mr. Britling,* or a *Passage to India, The Divine Fire, Tents of Israel, Joanna Godden,* or *The Irish R.M.,* and how joyfully he deserts his shockers for the better stuff. But he must have his story: and to have his story properly he must have all the stories ever written in English reinforcing the writer's powers: in other words, the tradition of the English novel, as a background for the modern work.

There are, in the main, two types of writer—the instinctive writer who learns to write because he has a story to tell, and the deliberate writer who critically enjoys the use of language and invents a tale in order to give himself opportunities for experimenting with words. Hugh Walpole is clearly the instinctive writer. His prose always satisfies the plain man's hunger for facts instead of frills. His sentences are sacks into which

he pours the contents of his story. He does not make his sacks of different material according to the differing values of the contents, he does not hesitate distractedly between gold tissue or velvet brocade, between gossamer or butter muslin; but he has always on hand his supply of good hard-wearing cloth, not showy but supple and strong. For, like most traditives, he depends not on the sack, but on the contents of the sack for his effects. We see that in the scene of Robin's surrender. In the chapter itself and in the preceding pages there is no verbal quickening of the pulse, no enrichment of preliminary paragraphs, no simplification of style in the actual scene, to match the struggle between the two human creatures and their final atonement. The words build musically no scene to themselves: they are merely used to convey their technical meaning to the brain of the reader. Only in his latest book has Hugh Walpole developed any sense of rhythm, any interest in the Shakespearean dodge of conveying meaning in two ways at one and the same moment: of speaking to the intellectual through the meaning of words, and to the illiterate through the sound of words: to

do, for example, to a group of readers of all sorts and kinds what the speech of Oswald in *Lear* does to a similar group of listeners:

CORNWALL: What was the offence you gave him?
OSWALD: I never gave him any:
It pleas'd the king his master very late
To strike at me, upon his misconstruction;
When he, compact, and flattering his displeasure,
Tripp'd me behind; being down, insulted, rail'd,
And put upon him such a deal of man,
That worthied him, got praises of the king
For him attempting who was self-subdu'd;
And, in the freshment of this dread exploit,
Drew on me here again.

No doubt the trained reader or trained listener can grasp, the very first time he hears them, the precise meaning of these phrases and their exact relation to each other; but I doubt if, on one reading or hearing, the average reader or playgoer would be able to paraphrase accurately the whole speech. The actual sense is conveyed tortuously; but as a series of sounds, how brilliantly understandable the speech becomes! Breathlessness, discomfiture, the clutch after lost dignity,

bodily fear, injured innocence, malice, sore bones, the delicious knowledge that he is going to be backed by his master—all this is so perfectly conveyed by the mere sounds of the phrases chosen, by the rhythms of the sentences, the breaks, the pauses, the jumped pronouns and short solid words, that any reader or listener would be rightfully indignant if he were accused of not completely understanding Oswald's exact feelings, that is to say, the meaning of his speech. But it is the sound he understands by, not the sense.

It is a trick, of course: and less valuable to the novelist than to the dramatist; but the use of this double language is a measure of the cunning of dramatist and novelist alike. Jane Austen never errs in her blend: Meredith succeeds often, fails often, but always brilliantly: Dickens is uneven. Dickens' Weggian habit of dropping into poetry when he is in the grip of moral indignation or emotional sentimentality is an awful example of how not to do it; the death of Quilp is sheer blank verse—

> It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight,
> Now bruising it against the shiny piles,
> Now hiding it in mind or long rank grass!

But in comedy he can use the trick to perfection:

"You are a couple of mean——"

"Remember, sir, you shall pay dearly for this," said Fogg.

"Rascally, pettifogging robbers!" continued Mr. Pickwick, taking not the least notice of the threats that were addressed to him.

"Robbers!" cried Mr. Pickwick, running to the stairhead as the two attorneys descended.

"Robbers!" shouted Mr. Pickwick, breaking from Lowten and Perker and thrusting his head out of the staircase window.

He can be just as assured in quiet moments:

I was on the point of asking him if he knew me, when he tried to stretch out his arm, and said to me, distinctly, with a pleasant smile:

"Barkis is willin'!"

And, it being low water, he went out with the tide.

Here the sense of the words is beautiful indeed; but it is the rhythm of the sentence, the pure sound of stilled waves and dragging waters that, reinforcing the sense, brings a lump into one's throat.

But the method is not used by all story-tellers. Fielding only uses it ironically: Scott and Hardy

cast the sense in a style that does not require such onomatopœic reinforcement: their rhythms are personal. Trollope never uses the method: Henry James stultifies the effect by using it to suggest mental subtleties which are more properly conveyed by the meaning than the sound; for sound is reserved by the most skilful masters for the expression of motion and emotion rather than thought. Among the classic moderns Kipling is, of course, the supreme master of this fascinating trick of art: Wells uses it much as Dickens did, but more carelessly: Galsworthy and Bennett do not use it at all. But nearly all the middle moderns use it, quietly and with discretion; while the experimentalists have just found it out. To judge from the fuss that the modernist Gentle Reader will make of a page of Gertrude Stein or a paragraph of *Ulysses* (whose value does not lie in its verbalities) it might be thought that the method had only come into being since the war, instead of being an art form older than English literature.

But Hugh Walpole—and one takes the early big scene in *The Wooden Horse* as typical of his big scene in every book—depends on the actual thoughts and happenings which he is conveying

to the reader to make his effects for him. In this particular scene he is emphasizing the fact that, while youth and age are accidental physical states of life, essentially they are mental attitudes to life: that there is in one sense no youth or age possible to the human soul: just as there is no time. The soul shifts its sense of values every now and again, and to such shiftings we give certain names—childhood, youth, middle age, old. But not every soul shifts at all. Some shift but two or three times; while an experienced soul can shift to and fro in time, at will, when moved thereto by interest, sympathy, love, or the desire to help another age-bound or youth-bound personality. In other words, youth, age, and time are experiences, not qualities. An experienced soul is one that has learned to exercise its imagination—imagination being among other powers, the power to shift one's sense of values.

And the value of the Robin-Harry scene lies in the fact that the young author does, for the time being, thus shift to and fro; that he is able, in spite of his own youth, to comprehend the older as well as the younger creature of his imagination and observation. Through this comprehension the

two creatures, Harry and Robin, become themselves capable of a sympathy and understanding of each other that is extraordinarily moving.

This capacity for breadth of view and detachment is again a special attribute of the born story-teller's; though it is seldom that it is combined with so passionate an affection for the creatures thus exposed and dissected. For few young writers are tolerant of all their own creatures: few can resist immortalizing their own personal revolt against the elder generation that has, this way or that way, oppressed them. Even Jane Austen may be suspected of some special enjoyment in writing the scene between Elizabeth Bennett and Lady Catherine. After all, *Pride and Prejudice* was finished before the author was twenty-two; and was there not a disposition in some quarters to regard the youthful Miss Austen as "a husband-hunting butterfly"?

That Charlotte Brontë, engaged on her first novel, found relief in writing the scene between the Crimsworths, and exquisite relief, in her second book, in letting the small Jane terrify Mrs. Reed, seems at any rate plain enough; and Dickens was only twenty-six when his nineteen-year-

old Nicholas overwhelmed with righteous indignation those elderly dastards, Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gride:

"One word!" cried Ralph, foaming at the mouth.

"Not one!" replied Nicholas. "I will not hear one save this! Look to yourself and heed this warning that I give you! Day is past in your case and the night is coming on!"

"My curse, my bitter, deadly curse upon you, boy!"

"Whence will curses come at your command? Or what avails a curse or blessing from a man like you?"

Isn't that a young Mr. Dickens paying off juvenile scores with such extreme enjoyment that he completely forgets his own chuckle earlier in the same book, when Nicholas comes on for his crack scene with Mrs. Crummles?

When Mrs. Crummles (who was his unworthy mother) sneered and called him "Presumptuous boy!" and he defied her, what a tumult of applause came on!

Yes, the crassness, conceit, and inadequacy of age in its dealings with youth is a most popular theme, as Meredith knew well enough when he wrote *Richard Feverel,* and youthful wrongs are never forgotten, as Samuel Butler with bitterness makes clear in *The Way of All Flesh;* but understanding of the older point of view is

as rare as it is unfashionable. It is the more novel, then, to find a young man in his first book gently and honestly drawing the inadequacy, crassness, and conceit of youth, and without sparing the weakness of middle age, yet showing that that middle age has its widsoms and its generosities, that, like Mrs. Grantley, it knows "even in the extremest heat of battle, how to spare the young and tender."

I have dealt at great length with this first novel not because it stands high in the list of Hugh Walpole's achievements, but because from it as a whole, and specially from that one scene, a critic might safely have prophesied some part of the writer's future. It is not a showy piece of work; but it does show a most unusual combination of open-mindedness and open-heartedness, with the story-telling gift. Since Trollope's day no writer had ever displayed so firmly this particular, this engaging blend. The problem for the hopeful reader was, of course, "Have we here a minor Trollope, or is this new man going to add something to the Trollope tradition?"

The answer to that particular question was promptly made. Barely a year after *The Wooden*

*Horse* came out, Hugh Walpole published *Maradick at Forty*—a book deriving not from Trollope, but from Trollope's very antithesis, from the dreamer and symbolist, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

## *CHAPTER IX*

THE prime difference between Hugh Walpole's first and second workshop novel is the different quality of ambition displayed. In the first novel we have an interesting, well-written story, unexpectedly mature in its general technique and its individual character-drawing, but with no sus-

tained indications in it of any directed purpose or future expressive ambition in the author's mind. *The Wooden Horse,* in fact, is a typical traditional novel. Yet, though there was no sustained scheme, there was, even in this first venture, more than one sign of the experimental uses to which Hugh Walpole was in time to put his traditional form. And there are signs, too, of what, in all his major novels, the under-subject would be.

It was clear, of course, from the start, what the upper-subject would be. The Trojan family group, with its loyalties, its shallownesses, its inner rendings and torments, foreshadows the Trenchards, the Coles, the Beaminsters, the Cardinals, the Duncans. The all-dominating figure of Clare is a shadow of Mrs. Trenchard and the Duchess: the sinister Mrs. Feverel prepares the reader for Mrs. Payne in *The Old Ladies.* It is interesting to compare these two last portraits. The young author displays his Mrs. Feverel in the obvious gloom of black and silence: the same author, twenty years later, has realized how much more awful the figure can be when it is gaudy

and talkative. Mrs. Feverel is a sketch which the author could not resist making, though he does nothing with it when made: Mrs. Payne is a masterpiece, and he does a very great deal with it. The history of Agatha Payne's lust, and its conclusion, is as awful in quality, though its effects are more limited, as the history of Philip of Spain in De Coster's *Till Ulenspiegel.* But it remains the same figure:

> She [Mrs. Payne] would appear at Mrs. Amorest's door tall and shapeless and silent. Staring. It was generally in the early dusk of the winter afternoon, and often in these days the rain tickled the window-panes and rustled about the coals. Mrs. Amorest would be reading her book. She would look up and see the tall old woman there.

For that is how Hugh Walpole saw the figure in 1924; but twenty years earlier he describes it thus:

> Mrs. Feverel entered—ponderous, solemn, dressed in a black silk that trailed behind her in funereal folds. Her hands were clammy to the touch and her voice was a deep bass. She said very little, but sat down silently by the window, forming, as she always did, a dark and extremely solid background. Robin hated and feared her.

But then the young author continues, like all young authors, blithely to weaken the portrait by vague repetitions:

> There was something sinister in her silence—something ominous in her perpetual black.

He does not say that Mrs. Payne is being sinister and ominous, twenty years later: he makes her so, without comment.

But the early portrait, before the repetitions begin, is very good: its main fault is the fact that Mrs. Feverel is linked with the charming Dahlia, who, once again after the manner of young creators, is not allowed to be her mother's daughter. They are arbitrarily linked by Mr. Walpole, and the fact weakens the truth of their characters. Mr. Walpole might have studied his Dickens —Mrs. Wilfer, Bella, and Lavinia are at his service! But by the time he writes *The Green Mirror* he has learned the trick of relating his characters without losing their individual sharpness of outline. His Katherine Trenchard, so unselfish, is yet so entirely her selfish mother's daughter. Maggie (of *The Captives*) is an in-

dividual to her finger tips and yet the niece of both her aunts.

But though Dahlia and her mother have no connection with each other, Robin and Harry are clearly father and son; and they, too, reappear constantly. Harry Trojan, indeed, with his amiability, his astonishing confusion of sentiment and sentimentality, his vague, irritating, middle-aged boyishness, and his elastic common sense, reappears in every book Hugh Walpole writes. Hugh Walpole seems to have had his whole world in existence in his mind before he began to write at all. He has, in twenty years of novel-writing, enormously enlarged his own powers of observation, imagination, and description: with every book he strengthens his own capacity to convey to his readers news of this world of his which he knows so well; but he does not know it differently. He never, for instance, discovered in it a new type of human being. His men and women are all developments of the workshop figures of the first two novels. Once only did he attempt a new type, in Rosalind of *Wintersmoon:* and she is unsuccessful because, though she exists to-day, as Mr. Walpole has recognized, she did not exist at

the time of his apprenticeship: and so he cannot sympathetically, through his own recollection or through his imagination, recreate her in modern terms. For he can only create through imaginative transference of himself into the created creature's brain and heart. But Rosalind is not of his period: he does not know where she keeps her heart. She appears to him, and so far as he does convey her to the reader, as a creature who has suffered, like Wells's Plattner, the inversion of the right and left sides of the body. He chronicles her behaviour with skill and care; but she still remains for the reader a creature of the moon: we look moonward and see her walking about like a fly on the ceiling, imperturbably upside-down. It is curious, too, that here again, though *Wintersmoon* is his latest book and though he is perhaps at his best in drawing family ties, he fails to convey the relationship between Janet and Rosalind. The human relationship indeed is completely convincing—the reader never doubts that the two love each other, and perfectly comprehends the different type of affection which each spends on the other; but they are sisters only because he says so. It is perhaps

his only failure in the creation of family pairs. We believe absolutely in the blood tie between Henry and Milly, Sir Charles and Lady Bell-Hall, the Aunts in *The Green Mirror,* Mark Trenchard and his sister Grace in *The Captives,* and the father and son in *The Man with Red Hair.*

But it is not only his later handling of character and group life that Mr. Walpole's early work foreshadowed. If *The Wooden Horse* predicated the traditional novel, *Maradick* gave definite hints that there would be experiments and innovations in structure and idea. Especially marked were the indications that there would be an attempt to revive the old-fashioned taste for horror. If the realist and the moralist are responsible for *The Wooden Horse,* in *Maradick* the fantastic has arrived to complete once more the traditive blend.

The early fantasts were, as we have seen, greatly preoccupied with the problems of horror. Horror, as they saw it, was the interference of supernatural evil with the natural workings of human life and fate. Now the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries were perfectly

prepared to accept supernatural interference in their novels. But Victorian materialism drove the horror school to specialization, to the short story. The ghost novel ceased to be read, and the ghost story became the refuge and the tomb of a form of literature once all powerful. It was well for the future of the novel that the horror school did thus collapse: it set free the lovers of fantasy, who could not for long be content with mere thrill-making. In their boredom they turned, for the time being, altogether from the use of horror, and fantasy began to express itself once more in terms of faëry. George Macdonald, Fiona Macleod, Hewlett, Morris, and in our own day De la Mare and Dunsany flooded the novel with dawn colour, twilight, and summer moonshine. Corpse candles, in fact, went out of fashion, and, for the time, the interest in pure evil went out of fashion with them.

The career of Oscar Wilde had perhaps something to do alike with the turning away from studies of supernatural horror and the new Georgian return of interest in Satanism. The English are a race of humanists rather than artists: and

it is probably the history of the author combined with the extremely practical morality of certain tales, notably *Dorian Gray,* which gave him his curious vogue. *Dorian Gray* did not raise the question What is evil? What is good? it appeared rather as a sort of poster of the 'nineties, exclaiming: Evil! Good! And the reader (the young reader, for Oscar Wilde was once the classic of adolescence) contemplating the poster did, I think, give a shudder: in other words, reacted to the warning of the moralist, so adroitly hidden behind the affectations of the æsthete. But the poster has had another effect on the writers. It roused curiosities that might have died again but for the war. But the war sent them back to their proper study—man—crying, not "Behold the wicked man!" but "What is evil?"

It is the cry of the age.

The tendency among the elder moderns is to avoid direct answer. The assumption of Shaw and Wells is clear—evil is matter out of place, and good, matter in place. They devote themselves to deciding the place. Galsworthy, agonizing dispassionately over society, convinced that "for the great part of mankind to see anything

. . . is fatal," writes "Abandon Hope!" over some one page of every novel and every play:

TENCH: All this—all this—and—and what for?
HARNESS (*in a slow grim voice*): That's where the fun comes in!

But Galsworthy, no more than Wells or Shaw, sees evil as an energy or a state. Evil to him is misadjustment. He has never, on his knees and panting in mortal fright, observed and recorded a wicked man's soul abandoning its body, as Blake did, as Bunyan did. He cannot help making his sinners into heroes: which is as much as to say that the problem of evil does not interest him. He persists in seeing the sinner apart from his sins, and so the sins become a little unreal. Besides which, Galsworthy is without the traditional sense of romance. Irene is a figure of the most unromantic thing in the world—the English drawing room.

But the problem of good and evil can only be tackled by romantics, whether they are traditive or experimental. For the problem involves the most romantic of all human actions—a plunge into the unknown—the discovery of a new world.

But romance, in the large and leisurely traditional sense, is not fashionable to-day. Periods are the fashion, not continuity. It follows then that unless the reader can find that rarish creature, a traditional novelist, and inject into him a desire to explore and experiment, it is unlikely that there will be any satisfactory new literature that needs for its enjoyment a sense of history.

But a traditionalist thus interested becomes at once traditive, for he cannot write of the problem of good and evil save experimentally. For our view of good and evil to-day is a new view, and our curiosity takes a form which it has never before taken in our history. We have experienced a war like no other war, a war of forces, not of individual vanities and ambitions: and in the light of the experience our view of what good is and what evil is has changed for ever. We are for the first time in English history consciously recognizing a third sex in morals—necessity. There is good and there is evil still; but there is also necessity.

Of all the young novelists whom the war developed, Hugh Walpole, I think, had most clearly shown in his pre-war workshop pieces that he

was ready for such development. He showed in his first book, too, a quite peculiar sense of the dramatic, the literary effectiveness of evil, as of a torch lighting up any scene or picture of life. The curious little account of an early tragedy in the Trojan family has no real place in the book: it certainly explains, unnecessarily, the curious name of the Trojan family seat, which was called The House of the Flutes; but it throws no further light on the history of the Trojans: they develop none of the qualities implicit in such a story. But it throws an absolute search-light on the author's mind and on the direction of his interests:

> It had been called the "House of the Flutes" since the beginning of time. . . . Of course it had its origin in tradition. In the early days when might was right, and the stronger seized the worldly goods of the weaker and nobody said him nay, there had been a Sir Jeremy Trojan whose wife had been the talk of the country-side both because of her beauty and also because of her easy morals. Sir Jeremy having departed on a journey, the lovely Lady Clara entertained a neighbouring baron at her husband's bed and board, and for two days all was well. But Sir Jeremy unexpectedly returned, and, being a gentleman of a pleasant fancy, walled up the room in which he had found the erring couple and left them inside. He then sat

outside, and listened with a gentle pleasure to their cries, and, being a musician of no mean quality, played on the flute from time to time to prevent the hours from being wearisome. For three days he sat there, until there came no more sounds from that room.

That anecdote has nothing to do with the Trojans: such a man is no ancestor of theirs; for, like all Hugh Walpole's family groups, the Trojans have not enough strength for the performance of actual cruelties. The tragedy of these ancestral oaks is always, for the author, the fact that they are in reality mere touchwood. But the little sketch of active and ingenious cruelty is interesting because it is a clue to the writer's future under-themes. Among other clues is the sporadic use of symbols and the converting of natural happenings through coincidence into symbols. The incident of the girl singing "Cruel Coppinger," the death of Sir Jeremy at the crisis of the struggle between Harry and Clare, the very names of house and inn—the House of the Flutes—the Bended Thumb—above all the end of the story itself, with its picture of the frozen Clare watching the snow—all these things go to show that here was a new theory on the way to

be worked out. Here was the familiar English novel form about to be put to new uses altogether, uses to which Shaw in *Man and Superman* and *Heartbreak House* and *St. Joan,* the young Flecker in *Don Juan* and *Hassan,* Munro in his unwieldy pieces *Rumour* and *The Mountain,* was putting the drama: to which James Joyce was to put the fragments of the novel form which he and his school had disintegrated.

The purpose thus indicated, though probably quite unconsciously indicated in *The Wooden Horse,* became in *Maradick at Forty* a definite intention. It accounts for the partial failure of the tale as a tale. Hugh Walpole was trying to do a very big thing indeed, a thing that, twenty years later, he was to pull off with complete success. Naturally he failed. The attitude of the average reader to the story is the measure of his failure.

The Gentle Reader, though he enjoyed *Maradick* when it first appeared, though it remains a favourite with him, will never be persuaded to treat it as an important book: and this because it is so extremely young—young not with the slick brilliance of *Plain Tales from the Hills,* or with the *Young Woodley*-like bloom of Richard

Middleton's first essays, but young with the more painful sort of youth. It is all stammers and stutterings, and enthusiasms and lapses of taste, and absurd and unnecessary embarrassments and sentimentalities. It is as callow as it can be. Indeed, its very title betrays it. Only a very ingenuous young man would call this history of every man in search of his youth *Maradick at Forty*. If Mr. Walpole were writing this story to-day it would never occur to him to call it anything but Maradick at Fifty! For that is the age which the young Mr. Walpole was drawing: and drawing very well. He has observed all the tricks of the particular time of life and reproduced them. Maradick is unmistakable: we have all met him and liked him and been sorry for him—at fifty! But that young Mr. Walpole evidently thought a man of forty something indescribably elderly. As for the age of fifty—it was right out of his imaginative sight. Forty is already old to twenty-four: and very heartily the author sympathized with his unfortunate hero:

> He was forty and life was over—its adventures, its emotions, its surprises, its voices and its great romance.

And when the unfortunate Mr. Maradick watches a courting couple, his author makes him reflect:

> What fools they were! He would like to tell them so. He would like to show them that he had been like that once, fifteen years before.

Isn't that delightfully young?

But it is all admirable as the reaction of a man of fifty-five or sixty-five. Mr. Walpole's imagination did not fail him in the least: indeed one of his prime virtues is his extraordinarily vivid and quick sympathy with other people's moods; but his youth was comically in his eyes when it came to dates. Indeed, writing somewhere about the fatal age, the other Mr. Walpole has his paternal chuckle over that young author. He says in *The Crystal Box:*

> I once wrote a novel which I called *Maradick at Forty* (and when writing it spelled forty "fourty" throughout). The point of this story was that Forty was the end of everything, that reaching it you may as well give up the fight and be nursed into your grave. I was warned that the day would arrive when I should laugh at my foolish childishness and now that day has come!

But childishness is not a fair description of the quality. It is youthfulness rather—and such youthfulness has charm. Mr. Walpole's mature work on the same theme, in the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair,* has all the qualities that *Maradick* lacks. It is an important work, both as to contents and as to technical achievement. It lacks one thing—the charm of youthfulness! How cruelly just are the gods!

And so *Maradick at Forty* lives on in the affections of the reader by virtue of its faults. The Gentle Reader enjoys the fact that his author is no longer being careful, as he was in his first book. It amuses him when his author asserts, for all his readers to hear, that this time he is jolly well going to do what he likes! Now what his author likes is to make his characters say every single thing that they have ever thought or felt, aloud and twice over. They do not feel very passionately, and they do not think very deeply, but they do enjoy themselves so infectiously that the reader enjoys himself with them.

But it is not in the description of their too facile reactions to each other and to life that the young author showed his promise, but rather in the ex-

tremely credible, vivid, and acute pictures of minor characters, of lesser incidents: in the portrait of the countryside: and in the general and very skilfully managed movement forward of the group of characters as a whole which takes place between the first and last pages of the book: and finally in the boldness and, in spite of verbosity and clumsiness, the successful roughing out of a new type of plot. In *Maradick at Forty* we have the first of the double plots which are Mr. Walpole's real contribution to the modern traditive novel. The symbolic under-plot which is perfected in *Harmer John* and the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* had its beginning in *Maradick at Forty*.

The story opens with the departure of the Maradicks for their annual holiday at the Cornish watering place, Treliss. The Maradicks are a little uncertainly placed in society by the author, who assumes that they belong to the same class, but does not draw them so. Mrs. Maradick is pure suburb, and has brought forth two pink-and-white nondescript suburban daughters. Her husband, on the other hand, is a man of breeding and culture, a man supposedly successful in busi-

ness, though, as the author draws him, he is quite unimaginable in a city office. He is, of course, an artist—all Mr. Walpole's heroes are artists, whatever trade he formally assigns them. However, the couple are there to have their story told, and their relations with each other would be excellent drama if Mr. Walpole had once made it perfectly clear why Mr. Maradick had ever married Mrs. Maradick. But although we hear a good deal about their former feelings for each other, the reader only believes what he hears because the author has a persuasive way with him, not because the pasts of the two figures are implicit in their presents. The author clearly fell in love with characters and a situation; but he had fallen in love with the characters and the situation separately. He had not discovered that one must arise out of the other. Indeed at this period of the author's career he had the same gift for character-drawing that may be seen in a brilliant beginner at an art school whose sketches are so quick and clever that to the casual observer it appears as if the whole art had been mastered. The shallowness of such prentice work is only

realized when, years later, they are compared with the same artist's mature conceptions.

The Maradicks arrive at Treliss, settle, traditionally, at the famous inn, and proceed, still according to the familiar opening, to make friends with another family, the Gales. Sir Richard Gale is a variant of General Tilney or Sir Walter Eliot. He is married to a wife who, like Lady Eliot, is

> gentle and amiable; whose judgment and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation that made her Lady Eliot, never required indulgence afterwards. She had humoured and softened and concealed his failings and promoted his real respectability, and though not the very happiest being, had found enough in her duties, her friends, and her children to attach her to life.

But though, like his admirable wife, Sir Richard is based on tradition, he is an individual:

> He spent his life in devising means of enabling his wife to give sign and evidence to the world of her affection. He was entirely capricious and unreliable, and took violent dislikes to very many different kinds of people. He had always been a very silent man, and now his conversation was limited to monosyllables: he disliked garrulous persons, but expected conversation to be maintained.

A young girl, Alice du Cane, has been brought to Treliss with the Gales, so that the son, Tony, should propose to her. Tony is rather too boyish and eager, but a friendly, pleasing creature, the apple of his mother's eye. Alice loves him: he fancies that he is willing to marry her; but the spirit of Treliss has another fate in store for him and her: and for the rest of the group. For Treliss works its effects with extreme speed. No sooner does Maradick sit down to dinner with his wife than all the suppressed boredom and irritation and frustration of fifteen years of married life come to the surface. He protests against life and her:

"It's been going on like this for years, and how long do you think I'm going to stand it? You don't care at all. I'm just like a chair, a table, anything. I say it's got to change."

It does change. He leaves his wife to her just resentment and proceeds to enjoy his late-discovered capacity for enjoyment. His enjoyments are harmless enough. His ache for freedom and affection is for the moment satisfied by adventuring into the town with Tony. They stumble into the yearly festival dance, a native dance, a

harvest home, a ritual inherited from the old times before them by a people still past-bound.

> It was a Dance of Hearts. It was the great moment at which certainty came to you, and, as you followed that drum down the curving street, you knew that the most wonderful thing in the world had come to you, and that you would never be quite the same person again; perhaps she had danced with you down the street, perhaps she had watched you and listened to the drum and known that there was no question any more. I do not know how many marriages in Treliss that drum had been answerable for, but it knew its business. . . .
>
> A delirium seemed to seize the front lines, and it passed like a flame down the ranks. Faster, faster. For heaven's sake, faster! People were singing, a strange tune that seemed to have no words but only a crescendo of sound, a murmur that rose to a hum and then to a scream, and then sank back again into the wind and the beat of the drum.

After the dance is ended they encounter "the little man in brown," Andreas Morelli: and Tony discovers that his daughter, Janet Morelli, is Helen, is Deirdre, is Juliet, Miranda, is the spring goddess herself! He plunges into love, dragging Maradick after him as chaperon. Maradick, half annoyed, half amused, lets himself behave as the fates appear to expect, becomes the confidant of the enraptured Tony, his anxious

mother, and the discarded Alice. And yet another acquaintance, a travelling Punch-and-Judy man who warns him against Morelli. He learns from him and from his own observation that Morelli is frankly no proper creature of the earth, but a Pan in trousers, a charming child, a cruel devil, a wise poet, a greedy animal. Tony discovers that his daughter leads a miserable life with him, and plans an elopement at which Maradick connives.

Meanwhile Maradick himself and his wife have each had their own emotional adventures. Treliss has tested them both. A gradual change of character has, in fact, taken place in all the principal actors in the holiday play. There has been an odd battle going on in the heart of each —between Me and Thee—Lust and Love—Flesh and Spirit—Evil and Good. Each in his own fashion has faced his familiar sin and beaten it to its knees, and in so doing liberated his own soul, much as Maradick, facing Morelli and his own fear of Morelli, has liberated Morelli's soul —his daughter Janet. After the ghastly struggle in the dark with Morelli, it is comparatively easy for Maradick to cope with his own problem, his

passion for Mrs. Lester. He recognizes the quality of his passion and conquers it, and, his holiday over, returns to his changed and bettered daily life, looking forward to the next forty years with something of the intensity with which he has, till then, mourned over the forty that are past. And the lesser folk of the story leave Treliss in much the same mood. It has tried them; taught them, according to their capacity for learning, their strengths and weaknesses: given them that hope which comes of self-knowledge—knowledge of one's own character, capacities, and potentialities.

Only three characters remain unchanged when the story closes: Morelli and Punch—active Evil and active Good—and Treliss itself, Life itself, passive, neither good nor evil, ready to assume whatever shape men choose, yet retaining, in spite of men and their good and evil, its own colours, its own time and tide.

## CHAPTER X

WITH his second book Hugh Walpole may be said to have shown his hand. His principal business as a novelist would, in the future, be to represent the lives and wars of ideas through stories of the lives and wars of individuals. But for some time to come, indeed throughout his writing life,

the histories of individuals interested him quite as much as the lives and deaths of ideas: and in several books he concentrates on perfecting such settings for ideas rather than on displaying the ideas themselves.

These settings are, with two exceptions, in the English tradition. Hugh Walpole's immediate traditional forbears are Hawthorne, Trollope, and Thackeray. From Hawthorne he gets his symbolism, from Trollope he derives his use of family life, from Thackeray his use of society. He is in the tradition, too, when he annexes his own tract of England—he calls it Glebeshire —with its central cathedral town of Polchester, its townlets, villages, its sea and countryside. He did not, having once found it, resolve never to quit it: indeed London is almost as frequently used as a background as Polchester itself: and there is also the Cambridge novel, *Prelude to Adventure,* and two novels of Russian life: while in the first book of his third period, *Wintersmoon,* he goes to the Lakes. But the main effect of the mass of work is an alteration between a familiar, slightly old-fashioned London, an undated country town, and a timeless countryside. These are

the proper backgrounds for his protagonists. It may be remarked that the town background is employed principally when there is no direct use of symbolism in the story (there is always a certain use of it). The countryside is emphasized when the battle is joined between forces rather than individuals. But always the reader is aware of the setting as a part of the tale. No piece of landscape, no spire, no cot is imported, American fashion, as "local colour." There the place is and always has been, and in it and nowhere else can the inhabitants be truly alive.

In *The Crystal Box,* Hugh Walpole gives us an account of how he discovered his domain.

Scribbling had been, he says, the sole refuge of a boyhood (the parallel is here again curiously close) as tormented as Trollope's:

> The world of my novels became during this time so real to me that the world of school and cathedral and family faded into thin air. I remember once, when a stout overgrown boy was trying to command me to do something or other and I refused, that he threatened me with some dire penalty and I, sticking my chin in the air, replied: "Rot! You can't do anything! You're not real!"
>
> All this time I was writing, writing, writing.
>
> "Arnado the Fearless," "Charles the Bold," "The Trump

of the Grave," "In the Name of the King," "The Doom of the Halberts"—all of them historical romances. Mine was the true artist's impulse then, pure and undefiled! No one read my stories. I had no hope of gain for them. I wrote simply because I could not help myself. Two or three years ago, when it was the fashion to publish juvenile efforts, I opened a drawer and searched through my romances. They were of a desperate badness that makes my cheek pale now when I think of them. No merit of originality or form or narrative to be found in any of them anywhere, and yet I may say with truth that I was far prouder of them than I have been of any of my eternally disappointing later works.

The fury of writing never slackened. On leaving the university the first novel was begun and destroyed:

It was to be a real novel with life of to-day for its background and grown-up people for its characters, and the life and intrigues of a cathedral town for its subject. I began it, I remember, in a state of extraordinary excitement one evening in my dreary Liverpool lodging. The evening was wretched, rain was bashing the window panes, the fire was almost out and I had not the courage to ask my landlady for more coal, the staring family group on the walls, the red plush sofa, the needle-worked mats and pincushions, the curtain of jingling beads across the door—these all depressed me beyond expression. I had had a bad day at the Mission, having "funked" two important ships; I was ashamed of myself, lonely, and hungry after a supper

of sardines and potted meat. I saw suddenly before me a cathedral, gigantic, proud, hostile, and beneath it, under its shadow, tiny midgets walking. The bells rang out and the midgets hurriedly crowded together like ants on an anthill. Then a great door opened like a mouth and in they jumbled and were no more to be seen.

I pulled paper toward me and began to write. People were moving, shops were opening, cabs were tottering along, children were crying, dogs were barking. I could not write fast enough to keep pace with the pictures. The lamp was brought in—I did not notice it. I went to bed in the early hours of the morning, ecstatic, triumphant. It was so easy. One had only to watch the people, to listen to their voices; it was so easy. Thank God I was a real novelist at last!

I had no more plan than that. I wrote, through that winter, twelve chapters, and then found myself in a terrible state of confusion.

I could not go anywhere nor do anything without dragging all my characters with me. And how many characters I had, and how many different things they were all doing, and how impossible to draw them all into any common movement! Moreover, when I had listened to them it had seemed to me that I heard their voices; but now when I read the dialogue it was as though only one character were speaking and that character myself!

I looked at the pile of manuscript and felt proud that I could write so much—but how to continue? I must begin again, and this time I must have a plan and only so many characters as were needed. And destroy all these beautiful pages. Yes, destroy all these beautiful pages. And so I had

my first lesson in novel-writing—a lesson, I may add, that to this day I have never properly learned.

In his account of his early work Hugh Walpole gives a sound criticism of his own methods. He is wrong, of course, in his conclusion; for in the workshop welter—and no modern suggests the welter quite so frankly as, in some of his work, Hugh Walpole does—a novelist was from the first seen, and out of it did at last emerge, as one of strength and unwavering purposes in experiment, yet knowing the resources of his tradition from A to Z.

Indeed, as a traditionalist he is not easy to criticize: it is only when Hugh Walpole experiments that the behind-the-scenes welter is revealed. And it may be said that in such readiness to reveal faults, in such disarming indifference to criticism, the real quality of this ambitious book-designer is made apparent. It takes a good deal of literary courage deliberately to court failure: and every writer must court failure when he attempts a thing a little too big for him. Yet only when he is thus attempting the impossible are the utmost possibilities of the human creature

lugged up into daylight. In art the little things are the perfect things, not the big ones.

Hugh Walpole might well have been contented to produce, in succession, *The Wooden Horse, Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill, The Captives, The Dark Forest, The Old Ladies,* and *Wintersmoon,* and have avoided altogether the criticism bestowed upon his more unwieldy experiments. These books are, technically, complete creations. Each has its definite ambition, each on a rising scale of technical and emotional difficulty: each succeeds because each is an undertaking well within the author's growing powers: each leaves the critic with little to say save that the author has done what he set out to do and done it well. But does Mr. Walpole content himself with doing, in the traditional manner, what he can do very well? Not at all! Between each of these publications he dashes back to the workshop, carelessly leaving the door open: there, reassuming his apprentice apron, he tries to do something new and difficult that he has not yet learned how to do. He does not at all regard the fact that, as he persists in sticking to his traditional form, he is hardly likely to get much credit for his experimental contents: will hardly be

credited, indeed, with any experiment at all: not, at least, until his twenty years' work is considered not book by book, but as a collective achievement.

As his third venture he chose a novel of school life called *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill.* Here he was working well within his own powers and he kept his tendency to drive two teams at once sternly in control as he told his dreadful story of a certain type of community life. The actual plot concerns the private misery of an usher at a third-rate public school: through the agony of his Mr. Perrin, the author forces his readers to apprehend what comes of crowding human beings into a cage, and there starving them of hope, peace, independence, and reasonable physical comfort. But that is the mere prelude to his main theme; for he is really interested in translating the phrase "He hath a devil" into terms of modern life.

"Once upon a time," he says in effect, "devils came from an outer hell and physically inhabited a wretched human body, dispossessing the soul. Then we knew them for demons of the pit and protected the victims by exorcizing those fiends. But now we disbelieve in hell: we turn the community into a hell on earth through lack of proper

mental sanitation: we engender in that hell the demon of nervous exhaustion: we see it entering into and possessing souls and bodies, and we do not think it our business to exorcize those demons. Instead we get irritated with the victim and reproach him for his lack of self-control.

"So here's a story for you about such a devil and such a victim," ends Mr. Walpole. "It's a good story in itself, and I have seen to it that it is written in a comfortable manner to which you are accustomed. Tell me what you think of my well-meaning Perrin and my decent Traill!"

Thus Hugh Walpole, traditional novelist, story-teller, humanist, business man: and the book is at once a success, artistic and commercial. What should Mr. Walpole do now?

Write another book, of course, exactly like *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*, only not quite so tragic this time, and with more of a love interest and a happier ending. It should be perhaps a third as long again. What a delightful book that would make and how easily Mr. Walpole could do it! And how it would sell!

But the pleasant anticipations of public, publisher, and probably and naturally Mr. Walpole

himself are shattered at this point by the resurgence of the other Mr. Walpole—the experimenter who bursts out of the workshop to cry defiantly to his public, his publisher, and his own traditional self, "Rot! You can't do anything! You're not real!"

For the only real thing for this experimenter is the problem which the traditional Mr. Walpole has so admirably put in *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill.* Having put it he would be content to leave the subject if his other self would let him. But his other self will not.

"We've written a good book: that's the end of it," says the traditionalist.

"Not good enough!" snaps the experimenter: "We've stated our problem, but have we solved it? Why is Perrin what he is? What is his demon? Nerves? So we say. But suppose we're wrong. Suppose it isn't nerves. If we had to believe in a personal devil by tea-time, how would it affect our view of Perrin? Did our Perrin, when at the end of the book he saved his soul by sacrificing his life to his enemy, dispossess himself of a demon? Or were his nerves merely braced back into normality by the shock of Traill's fall over

the cliff? Are we sure that we know what really happened?"

"Of course we're sure," says the traditional Mr. Walpole. "We wrote it that way, didn't we?"

"Yes," says his double: "But we wrote a different ending for America, didn't we? Could we have done that if we'd been perfectly sure? And if we're not sure, we ought to write the same story again if only to make sure. Or if you won't, I will! In the next story—I'm going to call it *Fortitude*—I'm going to make this state of nerves, this demon, this evil which can wreck a man's soul, the principal person."

"It can't be done."

"Why not?"

"Because it never has been done," retorts the badgered traditionalist. "You know we tried to personify states of mind in *Maradick,* and it didn't work. Let's stick to a plain story of real life. It's a dangerous thing to play with souls—or one's public."

"Nevertheless, we will play!" says the experimenter: and with such grim decision that the traditional and successful Mr. Walpole meekly follows his impetuous and dishevelled other self

back to the workshop again, where between them they produce, in swift succession, two experimental novels, two variations on the *Perrin* theme—the one, *Fortitude,* an interesting but not altogether satisfactory welter after the manner of *Maradick,* the other, *Prelude to Adventure,* a brilliant success.

This *Prelude to Adventure* was indeed the most rounded piece of work that Hugh Walpole had as yet achieved and it still takes its place in the front rank of his work. It is not his biggest book; but it is big: nor the most ambitious in conception, yet ambitious. It is an experiment beautifully and safely housed in an easy traditional form. Only once again, in *The Old Ladies,* is he so economically dramatic and so dramatically economical. In the actual writing also the change is marked. He tightens up his pages, rejects colloquialisms and confidentialities and sentimentalisms, and avoids repetition. The effect on his style is astonishing. When, for instance, he writes of a scared terrier—"Bunker wagged his tail; but the tiniest shiver passed like a thought through his body"—the verbalist stiffens to attention: even though his incorrigible author is

defiantly using the word "tiniest" for the second time in half a page.

But immensely as the value of this most original novel is enhanced by the manner in which it is written, it is the subject matter which rivets the reader's attention.

Nearly every book of Hugh Walpole's (save, of course, the child novels) depends for its effect on some accidental happening, some sudden blow of fate, change of fortune or estate, even of place, which leads to a change of heart. It is a favourite device of the older traditive novelists and Hugh Walpole never tires of it. The return of Harry in *The Wooden Horse,* the holiday at Treliss in *Maradick,* the battle of the umbrella in *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill,* the defeat of old Westcott in the first book of *Fortitude,* the coming of Ronder in *The Cathedral,* the uprising of the fog in the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*—all these external happenings are hinges on which the door of the story swings to let the characters pass from one state to another. Indeed so in love is the author with this idea of the significant event that he presently devotes one whole novel, *The Secret City,*

to the study of such an event itself. *The Secret City* is a picture of St. Petersburg at the beginning of the Russian Revolution. But there is no before or after in the story. We are not shown the final effects of the change on the human beings of the tale. All we are given is the actual, the meticulous history of the creaking open of a door.

But nowhere does Hugh Walpole use this effect so well as he does in *Prelude to Adventure.* Here the change is effected a sentence or two before the story opens at all. As the hero, Olva Dune, says at the end of his prelude to adventure:

> After I had killed Carfax, after his body had fallen and the wood was very silent, I was suddenly conscious of God. I can't explain that better. I can only say that I knew some one had watched me, I knew that the world would never be the same place again because some one had watched me, and I knew that it was not because I had done wrong, but because I had put myself into a new set of conditions that life would be different now.

The murder is the first fact in the story. Only when the reader leaves, with Olva Dune, the dripping winter wood and the dead body, and tramps

back with him through the fog to his lodgings, does the setting become clear to him. Here is a story of Cambridge, where young men

> paid their shining pounds for the capture—conscious or not as it might be—of an atmosphere, a delicate and gentle setting to the crudity of their later life.

By the "shining pounds" this Cambridge is proved pre-war: still more by the attitude to the "murder." It is nothing of the kind—at best, an accident—at worst, manslaughter. It is impossible to believe that a young man of to-day, with the war so close to him, could be so shattered by his own act. Death is cheaper than it used to be. And even though he writes of a more squeamish generation, it is to be doubted if Mr. Walpole was wise to underload his hero. We must accept the word "murder" to understand the theme, and it remains difficult to do so.

But once accepted the story runs faultlessly. The worthless Carfax is found dead; then the reader learns that Carfax is "a dirty hypocrite," that Olva Dune, meeting him by accident, provoked by his use of a woman's name, has struck him. By an unlucky chance the blow has been

fatal. Officialdom never discovers Dune's share in the business, nevertheless he does not escape punishment. He has (if only in his own judgment) put himself outside society. He is safe, but alone. The loneliness nearly kills him; but the alternative to being alone—the company of God—is something he cannot face at all.

The rest of the tale is the *Hound of Heaven* done into prose. The hunt is up, and to and fro and in and out of Cambridge byways he flees in vain from the Huntsman. Even his external safety is jeopardized; for his mental state betrays him unnecessarily. He can no longer take the outer world and its affairs simply and sanely. Instead he lives in a state of perpetual shock:

"How is't with me when every noise appalls me?" Every idle event assumes for this outlaw the sinister significance that Strindberg saw in the drape of a curtain or the cohesions of lumps of coal.

The pursuit continues. It is not a question of extorting from a sinner remorse for his wrongdoing. But the youngster is an egoist, and far too brilliant and stubborn a one to be amenable to the ordinary discipline of fate. And so "God,"

as Olva calls the Power and the Glory that pursues him, has taken the slaying as its—His—chance to possess and master His creature. A will has to be broken before the peace which passeth understanding can be bestowed. A will is at last broken—but it is not God's. Olva, worn out, surrenders and submits: and instantly peace is given him—and his orders. He knows what he has to do. No public confession is asked of him; but he is asked instead to risk his own happiness by telling his future wife and her guardians the truth. Here the author steps in, Shakespeare's way, to heighten the effect by the introduction of a parallel. Olva discovers in the mother of Margaret a creature like himself, half mad with loneliness, with the longing to confess a story like his own: and the relief in surrendering her secret to a human listener is the shadow of his own relief. Her flight from pursuit has been prolonged and stubborn, and so her lot has been cruel; because Olva is young, capable of surrender, growth, and change, his burden is to be a lighter one. He has to leave what he loves and go out into the world, as Orestes went, to seek purification. His youth-

ful tragedy shall be but the Prelude to the true Adventure.

It is a thousand pities that the Adventure itself has never been chronicled. One can only imagine that Hugh Walpole did not do so because of the impossibility of returning his hero in the end to his original setting. Traditionally such a return is necessary; but Mr. Walpole must have realized that such a use of the traditional conclusion would be false art and false nature. He must have known that the modern Ulysses cannot return to his Penelope: or that, if he did, he would find her surrendered to wooers against whom his strength is nothing—"Time, absence, and change of heart!" But is such a conclusion to Adventure acceptable to a Gentle Reader? Of course not! And after all the reader has his rights. Better leave Dune to Margaret after the ambiguous fashion of Charlotte Brontë in *Villette*. It takes the simplicity of a Louisa Alcott to bring a hero back to his old love, with a wife on his arm.

Instead, then, of following out the career of Olva Dune, Hugh Walpole recast his material into the shape called *Fortitude*. If the *Prelude* is the conquest of man by God, *Fortitude* is the

story of the conquest of man by himself. The hero of *Fortitude* is also pursued by a Power; but it is a Power of darkness. There is a tyrannous strain of cruelty in his blood. For the Westcott race cannot control its own passions: it rots its own strength. Like all weakness masquerading as strength, its delight is tyranny: and the fathers torment the sons till, in their old age, they are in turn overthrown and tormented: and have left as their solitary pleasure the joy of watching the rot set in, and the tragedy repeat itself in the next generation.

This inheritance is early made plain to the boy, Peter, and he runs from it as from a lion in the path. But the day comes when he ceases to run, when he turns and masters his fate and his fear, and learns his lesson—to ride his lion, to master his own soul.

The story is traditive in form. It is at once fantastic, romantic, and realistic. It hovers between the symbolism of *Maradick,* the mysticism of the *Prelude,* and the author's growing pleasure in describing men and cities. It is more interesting as a link between two periods than as positive achievement. It is a stronger *Maradick.* Punch

revives as Stephen: Antonelli as old Westcott: while, following the fashion set by Thackeray, Charlotte Yonge, Trollope, not to mention Edna Lyall, and revived to-day by Kipling in his short stories, many of the minor characters—such as Alice du Cane, and Tony Gale, as well as Maradick himself—actually reappear: while Cards, the traditional villain, the Steerforth-Willoughby, wanders in from the *Prelude*.

The book foreshadows also the purely community novels—*The Duchess, The Green Mirror, The Young Enchanted,* and *The Old Ladies*. There are fine things to be found in it, some beautiful passages of descriptive writing, as well as certain unforgettable studies in the gruesome: and the relations between Clare and Peter are as believable as pathetic. Nevertheless there is a certain air of strain and weariness in the book, as if the author found the theme, handled with such detail, too much for his writer's strength, and was achieving his novel more through tenacity than through inner pressure. It is without surprise that we find him for the next few years interesting himself in social life and the life of children. For though *The Dark Forest* was pub-

lished before *The Green Mirror,* and *The Secret City* before *The Captives* and *The Young Enchanted,* it is safe to guess that *The Green Mirror* and *The Captives* are earlier in conception at least. *The Secret City* and *The Dark Forest* are war-born, inconceivable before 1914.

## *CHAPTER XI*

HUGH WALPOLE'S second period may be said to open with *The Duchess of Wrexe. The Duchess* and *The Green Mirror,* with its sequel *The Young Enchanted,* deal from different angles with the same situation: and both novels are foreshadowed in *The Wooden Horse.* "The

Wooden Horse," indeed, would, as a title, suit all three equally well, for each is a story of failure, of strength revealed as weakness after all. Hugh Walpole, curiously, never draws a strong, successful character. He does not believe, I think, that there is such a thing as strength. He says, or implies at any rate, that society is made up of the weak weaklings and the strong weaklings. The weak, the straws, have no tragedy and no shame, because they have no illusion of strength to lose. The strong, the oaks, know tragedy when they realize that they, too, are weaklings, touchwood oaks, and know shame when their weakness is made plain to the weaker weaklings who have depended on them.

Here is, you see, another departure from the novel of tradition, which demands that there shall be the point of sanity, the one strong and honest human being, the one Horatio, indeed, in every novel. The hero, even when he is the scamp Tom Jones, must triumph in the end, or resign his triumph to a stronger. Frank Osbaldiston beats Rashleigh and is troubled by no doubts as to which, essentially, was the better man. Dobbin wins his Amelia: Colonel Brandon steps into

Willoughby's shoes: Peter Jenkins brings home a competency: Louis Moore tames his leopardess: Dorothea and Will Ladislaw marry: Lord Lufton is none the less acceptable to Lucy for his dalliance with Griselda: even Meredith provides Vernon as a foil to the Egoist himself. But Mr. Walpole is traditive, not traditional: and the spirit of the age demands its hero tragical in weakness not in strength. Not by chance were Almayer and Lord Jim, Soames Forsyte, George Ponderevo, James Morell creatures of one generation. His particular form of obedience to the spirit of the age lies in the fact, not that he reveals his dominant figures' detected shames, but that he makes these figures feminine. Unconscious anticipation of conditions not then in existence made him, in four books, group his figures round a dominant woman.

Clare Trojan we have seen: she is the shadow of those coming events—the Duchess of Wrexe and Mrs. Trenchard. The Duchess of Wrexe represents more than the Victorian-Edwardian age. She is crabbed age stealing youth from youth: she is custom, law, the immovable object, an old woman tyrannizing over her family and over

London society, and by inference over the English nation and the British Empire. She is the "last great lady in England," monumental, but, like the tomb of Manuel in *Jurgen,* a monumental sham. She has power because her votaries must have a Ju-ju: like the people of *Old-Wives-tabledom* who

> fell down on their knees before the Pow-wow man and gave him a palanquin with a pole of solid silver and curtains of cloth of gold and carried him about on their own backs; but as soon as they had taken him up, the pole stuck to their shoulders and they could not set him down any more, but carried him on, willy-nilly, as Sinbad carried the Old Man of the Sea, which was a pitiable sight to see.

The principal votary is the Duchess's daughter, Adela—a rabbit and a gentlewoman: who so adores being bullied that (we are told in *Wintersmoon*) after her mother's death she turns spiritualist so that the domination may be continued. The Duchess rules her sons, Vincent, John, Richard, less harshly but as completely, and through them England and society—"Richard had been Prime Minister twice!" Four things oppose her—her grandson Francis, her granddaughter Rachel, the spirit of the age, and—her

own age! She is accustomed to break what opposes her: it is possible that she might have broken Rachel and Francis; but these last two she cannot break.

The novel is the history of her last fight. We see her first as a portrait, with a worshipper crying triumphantly:

"At last we've got her!" . . .

The Duchess received the colour and the sunlight, but made no response. She sat, leaning forward a little, bending with one of her dry wrinkled hands over a black ebony cane, a high carved chair supporting and surrounding her. She seemed, herself, to be carved there, stone, marble, anything lifeless save for her eyes, the tense clutch of her fingers about the cane, and the dull but brooding gleam that a large jade pendant, the only colour against the black of her dress, flung at the observer. Her mouth was a thin hard line, her nose small but sharp, her colour so white that it seemed to cut into the paper, and the skin drawn so tightly over her bones that a breath, a sigh, might snap it.

Her little body was, one might suppose, shrivelled with age, with the business and pleasure of the world, with the pursuit of some great ambition or prize, with the battle, unceasing and unyielding, over some weakness or softness. . . .

On either side of the chair were two white and green Chinese dragons, grotesque with open mouths and large

flat feet; a hanging tapestry of dull gold filled in the background.

Out upon these dull colours the little body, with the white face, the shining eyes, the clenched hand, was flung, poised, sustained by its very force and will. . . .

It was as though she had said: "They shall see nothing of me, these people. I will give them nothing" . . . and then the green jade on her bosom had betrayed her.

Maliciously the dragons grinned behind her back.

We follow her fortunes in the struggle with her own flesh and blood. She forces her grandchild, Rachel, into a suitable marriage with her own favourite, Roddy Seddon, partly because it is a good match, partly because, as Roddy himself dimly realized, she hopes he is going to hurt Rachel—"The Duchess liked hurting people." But Roddy loves Rachel. He loves her so much that he, and not the Duchess's manœuvres, cures her at last of her wistful, homesick passion for her cousin, and turns her, when his trouble comes upon him (he is broken in a hunting accident), into a loyal and loving wife. And through this reconciliation between the two young people the Duchess is finally broken, crumbled and tossed away into oblivion. The changes in her London and her England she could endure or rather ig-

nore, but Roddy in his passion for Rachel betrays the Duchess. She attempts to poison his mind against his wife and her cousin. He invites her to visit him (he is, of course, unable to move): she makes a tremendous effort and does so, only to find Rachel and Francis Breton with him. She is obliged to hear the truth of the pitiful love story, to realize Roddy's complete faith in his wife, and to see herself exposed, not as an evil genius—that she could endure—but as a meddling fool, out of touch with modern life. She has shown no mercy in her time to the young: now in their time the young show her no mercy; though they are apologetic in their cruelty:

> They were all silent. She sat there, her head down, leaning on her hands, brooding. Her anger seemed to have departed, her fire, her fury had fled: she was a very old woman—and the room was suddenly chilly. Before her were Rachel and Breton: they faced the ancient enemy. But as Rachel stood there, realizing that there had flashed between them the forces greater and more powerful than anything that their own small histories could contain, she had no sense of drama nor of revenge nor of any triumphant victory. A little while before she had been almost insane with anger. . . . Now something had occurred. Rachel only knew that three of them—Roddy, Francis, and herself

—were young and immensely vigorous, with all life before them; but that one day they would be old, as this old woman, and would be deserted and sick and past anyone's need of them.

"Oh! I wish we hadn't! I wish we hadn't!" she thought.

In that moment's silence they all might have heard the sound of the soft, sharp click—the click that marked the supreme moment of their relationship to the situation that had, for all of them, been so long developing—

Breton surrendered Rachel, Roddy received her, and, beyond them all, the Duchess definitely abandoned her world.

The Duchess is found out: her only chance of rehabilitation is to die and let her legend and her portrait wipe out the memory of her failure. But not even in death does she recover her prestige, at least for the women of the book:

"She wasn't terrible, she wasn't fine, she wasn't really anything except a peg for all sorts of traditions to hang on to. In herself she was just a plucky, theatrical, obstinate old woman. It was simply the idea of her that frightened us all. I remember the first time that I saw Yale Ross's picture of her—he'd caught all the ceremony and the terror. It was then that I had the first faint suspicion that she didn't, in herself, live up to the picture in the least.

"I suppose," she went on, coming up closer to him, "that that's why no one will ever be like her again—because no

one will ever be taken in so completely by shams again, never by the empty shell of anything."

But the men's verdict is a different one:

"Do you remember your Tiger idea you delivered to me once? I've often thought of it since. You said then that the reason why the Duchess and her times . . . had got to go was because their policy had been to give the Tigers of the world no liberty—to pretend indeed that they weren't there, and that now the time had come when every man should declare his Tiger, should give it liberty and, whether he restrained it or no, acknowledge its existence. . . . Well, now—what I want to know is this. What to your thinking is going to come of it all?" . . .

"What I want to see is less muddle, more brain, less waste of time, more progress. I believe the loosing of the Tiger is going to bring that about. That's why I welcome it—I don't care one little damn about your individual—let him be sacrificed every time for the general wisdom. Your Duchess, she was good for her age. Now she is against progress. She vanishes. That crowd of to-night has swept her away." . . .

"I see some chance at last for the plain man—not the clever man, or the especially spiritual man, or the wealthy man—but simply the ordinary man."

And yet:

"She *was* fine! I miss her more than I had any notion that I would! She stirred one up, she made one alive!"

He put the lamp on the floor and sat down for a minute amongst the shrouded furniture.

His mind passed from Brun's generalizations to the little bundle of people whom he knew—Rachel, Roddy, Lizzie Rand. To all of them the Tiger's moment had come; and out of it all, out of the stress and suffering and struggle, Rachel's child was to be born—instead of the Duchess the new generation. Instead of this old house, the hooded furniture, the anger at all freedom of thought, the jealousy of all enterprise, the slander and the malice, an age of a universal Brotherhood, of unselfishness, restraint, charity, tolerance. . . .

Perhaps after all he *was* an old sentimental fool. There had always been those at every birth and every death who had had their dreams of new human nature, new worlds, new virtues and moralities. . . .

He looked at last at the Portrait—

"I'm nearly as old as you. I shall go soon. But I miss you . . . you'd yourself be surprised if you knew how much!"

Not easily does the human being use his traditions. It is much easier to make a clear break: it is easier to burn your house and build a new one than to make your old property habitable without spoiling its looks. "But," says the author, "if you burn your house down, where will you shelter till the new one is built? Better adapt your

old structure to new purposes, as the schools and the colleges do."

In France they guillotined their duchesses, in Russia they obliterated them fancifully, like rats; but the French and Russian method sacrifices too much: we English are wiser. We do not allow our Duchess of Wrexe to depart in spectacular martyrdom (it is the pity of *The Forsyte Saga* that Soames ended on the forced heroic note): instead, her own children's children, born of her tradition, destroy her through developing her tradition. She is not wasted: she is used and absorbed.

But Mr. Walpole does not employ his Duchess merely as a symbolic figure. He puts her to other uses. He uses her, in particular, to typify the English female egoist.

The strong-minded woman, that bugbear of the 'eighties, has always had a special place in English literature. Not for nothing is England represented as a lady in a helmet with a trident, and sitting down. That conception of her must have arisen through an unacknowledged but general realization of the characteristics of the typ-

ical Englishwoman. Indeed, Hugh Walpole's Duchess of Wrexe is a figure, a tradition, as old as English history. She existed from the days of Boadicea to the days of Elizabeth: she was the Wife of Bath: she was Catherine Parr, Bess Hardwicke, Sarah Jennings, Lady Mary, Hester Stanhope: she was also Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria—for between the female egoist and the female leader there is necessarily but a thin neutral space: and it has always been, in the past, the tragedy of the lesser Englishwoman of strong character, that, without scope, her very virtues turn her into an egoist.

The novelists, from the beginning of the novel, have observed and used this female tragedy, generally for the enrichment of their comedy passages and seldom with sympathy. An Adriana, a Tabitha Bramble, a Mrs. Selwyn, Lady Catherine, a Mrs. Proudie, a Mrs. Poyser, a Miss Jenkins, a Becky Sharp, a Mrs. Wilfer, or a Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson is always acceptable to the Gentle Reader who generally has at least one formidable female relative in his own family. But he takes less interest in the tragic egoists. When he reads of a Lady Ashton, a

Cathy Linton, a Beatrice Esmond, a Rosa Dartle, a Mrs. Reed, a Letty Dale, a Lady Mason, or a Doña Rita, he reads with a certain awe but with precious little sympathy. In his understanding of the Gentle Reader's feeling toward such figures, Hugh Walpole is entirely traditional. He, fortunately, here makes no experiment. One says "fortunately," because he is too often tempted to glaze his outlines through sympathy. But tradition is stronger than sympathy when he draws his female egoists. He never spares them, and, in the earlier books, they are, as a result, his strongest, his most convincing figures. He is much tenderer to his men: which is, perhaps, the reason that, though he comes near to great portraiture with the Duchess, and again with Mrs. Trenchard of *The Green Mirror,* he has never achieved a Sir Willoughby Patterne.

Mrs. Trenchard, though less theatrically effective than the Duchess, is the complete egoist even more closely studied. She is Clare Trojan in full length—a cold woman, her sex life entirely subordinated to her love for her children, and this love turning into a brutal and cunning passion to possess and retain them, to govern their lives,

thoughts, and actions. Dearest of all her children is her eldest daughter Katherine.

As in *The Wooden Horse* the drama begins with a picture of a family and its life. It is a brilliant picture, in some ways the most realistic because the least touched by symbolism, of all Hugh Walpole's family groups. The Trenchards, as English as the Trojans, live their secure life in their beautiful country home and in their old-fashioned town house. The group is a matriarchy. The old grandfather, the easy-going husband, the two aunts (amazingly lifelike, these), the younger son and daughter, and Katherine herself are all governed, and happy enough under the rule of Mrs. Trenchard. Then Katherine falls in love with Philip, and instantly Mrs. Trenchard stiffens to the battle. Never did spider so delicately enmesh a fly. It is impossible to persuade Katherine to forsake him, so Philip is to be broken in to the Trenchard tradition. He is brow-beaten, cajoled, shamed, tricked, subtly subdued and weakened, till he himself knows, and Katherine sees clearly enough, that his very soul is in danger of suffocation. Then, by virtue of a strength, a

passion derived (therein lies the tragi-comedy of life and the story) from this dominant mother, Katherine breaks the spider's thread. She runs away, at a moment's notice, with her lover.

The escape may be compared with the escape in *Maradick*. Hugh Walpole has been at his favourite trick of repeating almost exactly a scene and an effect, and, by the superiority of the second version, completely justifying the repetition.

The end of the tale is once more a struggle between sentiment and truth, and with a victory for artistic truth for which it is difficult to praise the author too highly. A reconciliation scene must have been an immense temptation to a writer of Hugh Walpole's temperament. He resists it Says Mrs. Trenchard:

"If we meet what can we have now in common? If I had loved you less, perhaps it would be possible, but as it is —no."

Katherine had dried her tears.

They looked at one another. Katherine bowed her head. She had still to bite her lips that she might not cry, but she looked very proud.

"Perhaps," she said, very softly, "that one day you will want—you will feel—— At least I shall not change. I will

come whenever you want me. I will always care the same. One day I will come back, Mother dear."

Her mother said only:

"It is better that we should not meet."

Katherine walked to the door. As she passed her mother she looked at her. Her eyes made one last prayer—then they were veiled.

She left the house.

And in the sequel, *The Young Enchanted,* Mrs. Trenchard dies as implacable as Mrs. Reed or Rosa Dartle.

Katherine broke into a great cry: "Mother! Mother! Speak to me! Forgive me!"

She fell on her knees.

Mrs. Trenchard's eyes opened. There was a slight movement of the mouth: it seemed, in that half light, ironical, a gesture of contempt. Her head rolled to one side, and the long, long conflict was at an end.

It is perhaps the carriage of this iron character over into the later tale which gives *The Young Enchanted* its particular charm. It becomes, because of Mrs. Trenchard in the background, a novel of emancipation: after winter—spring! It is perhaps the lightest, the most truly fanciful and happy of Hugh Walpole's novels. Henry's charming, comical first love affair is

balanced against Milly's not too disastrous passion for a cad. Neither affair is overwhelming: each is utilized to show the development of two pleasant normal creatures from children into men and women. Here, says Hugh Walpole in effect, is admirable normal modernity developing out of the tradition of Mrs. Trenchard. And Mrs. Trenchard serves, implacable, to point the difference between the old and the new.

But though he has created thrice over this type of domestic egoist, Mr. Walpole has not yet worked out his sum to his complete satisfaction. He is still intrigued by this forceful woman—figure, egoist, or saint according to circumstances but always a leader. What is the difference between an Elfrida and a Monica?—he asks himself. Is it not the same Force moving each creature? Is not that Force good or bad according to the make-up of the creature, according to the circumstance which develops the creature in which the Force lodges? What would happen, for instance, if the Duchess were born without a liking to torment people?

To answer the question he wrote *The Captives*.

If *The Captives* is the strongest, the most sin-

cere, the most deeply and quietly felt of all Hugh Walpole's non-symbolical novels, it has perhaps become so because in it he does deal finally with the particular question—What is the difference between the egoist and the saint? Indeed it will be noted that his best books are each a final expression of opinion on a particular subject, a final book of a series. In *The Captives* he takes the qualities that made Clare, the Duchess, and Mrs. Trenchard into rulers of their clan—courage, determination, obstinacy, a passion to possess and control, and an imagination far-reaching and direct as the flight of an arrow, but without breadth. He now puts these qualities not into a soul's chamber swept, garnished, empty, but into a creature already supplied with the traditional virtues of English girlhood—sweetness, affection, a conscience, unselfishness and some sense. The result is the adorable wise fool—Maggie Cardinal.

All the traditional methods of presenting a heroine are used to give us Maggie, though in her final act of decision she is modern of the moderns. There is not only the lonely girlhood, the father's death, the migration to the home of

the two aunts in London: the later tradition, the Brontë contribution of the plain heroine, is also employed. Maggie is shy, dowdy, witchlike, but, also traditionally, with charm. But in adding to her unselfishness the startling qualities of the traditional egoist, Mr. Walpole once more adapts tradition to his own, his modern purposes. The tender heroines of the Victorian and Georgian ages had their strong heroes to lean upon; but Maggie (who is half-sister to another Maggie) loves no hero. She loves a nervous, highly strung, self-tormented human being, much weaker than herself, less fine, less charming: and so the plot develops spiritually, on altogether new lines.

It is in the tradition, of course, that religion should play its part in separating the lovers; but the narrow beliefs which wreck, for the time, both their lives, are described vividly, not scornfully: and Martin's break with Maggie and disappearance from her life is as new and poignant in its effect on the reader as if no such lovers' breach had ever occurred in literature before—though the suppression of letters by a bitter woman is as traditional a trick as may be found. But the novelty lies in the use of the trick. Hugh Walpole

employs it as he always employs coincidence and accident, to emphasize the fact that life and character cannot fundamentally be affected by such externals. If Maggie and Martin had been ready for each other no lost letters could have affected the course of their atonement. But Maggie has a lesson to learn and teach. She does not collapse with the loss of Martin: sensibly she rallies, sets herself, with humourless, pathetic intensity, to rectify the faults in her own character which have caused her, as she sees it, to fail life and Martin. In the course of this desperate self-education she makes another mistake—she marries! Then comes the picture of her strange life with the Trenchard brother and sister so sensitively painted that it makes the reader forget to ask his question—"would Maggie, liking not loving, ever have married Mark Trenchard? Many a woman would do it in a sort of revolt. Would Maggie?" Hugh Walpole thinks she would, and, conceding him this, then the reader admits that the change which comes over her is brilliantly observed and understood. Her life with Mark is the life of Brunhild with Gunther. Her force, her power, her leadership, is lost: she is passive and self-shamed. The

burden of the new failure is heavy upon her, and through it she fails again, fails the one creature whom, beside Martin, she loves—the deplorable Uncle Matthew. His suicide, brought about by her passivity, is an agony to her. She is tormented by the passion of pity.

It may be noted here that pity and cruelty are the only true "scarlets" in Hugh Walpole's books. Passionate love, for instance, he seldom draws. Indeed I can think of but one successful portrait of a creature in the grip of sexual emotion—Tom Seddon in *Wintersmoon.* But he draws passionate affections and friendships with extraordinary success: which is perhaps why his portraits of women are so good. For to the average woman who has not yet entirely altered her Victorian attitude to sex, love is an emotion rather than a passion, an unchanging state of soul rather than a hunger of the body. This attitude of the average woman explains possibly her ferocious dislike of the George Sand type.

But though Maggie is such an average woman, her affections are her passions. And when Martin comes back into her life, broken in mind and body, the Valkyrie in her awakens. Custom, habit,

affection, wifely duty, religious fear—these things she loosens from her like garments. She has one aim, one object, one hope—to restore to Martin the years which the locusts have eaten. She fights as the Duchess and Mrs. Trenchard fought: she prays as they could not pray. In the end she wins her battle.

## *CHAPTER XII*

THE Gentle Reader, if he has any sympathy at all with *The Captives* (I confess that it is for me the favourite among Hugh Walpole's novels), will probably guess that it gave its author much the same rest and refreshment as he, the reader, gets from it. It was published in 1920, after the

years which produced the hectic Russian novels: to write it must have felt like awaking from a nightmare. The book was, in form as well as content, a return to tradition, a reaffirmation of beliefs, literary and humane, that the war had half shattered and that the first after-war generation was refusing to respect.

*The Captives* is a long, leisurely book. The reader can feel in it the author's delighted recovery of poise, his pleasure in phases of life that, before the war, were commonly abused as humdrum. But though, in this strong and gracious story of average people, Hugh Walpole renounces interest in all but the daily round of life, it was merely a temporary turning away from problems that still intrigued and tormented him. Freshened and rested by *The Captives,* he turned again to his former subjects, and wrote in the next four years four books in which he does finally answer, at any rate to his own satisfaction, those questions which he first asked in *Maradick,* and has, in one form or another, been debating ever since.

For the war, which left no man or woman, no trade or profession unaltered, had a marked effect

on Hugh Walpole's literary work. It did, to a great extent, wipe away the superficialities. It left his style terser, his sympathies less facile, his reactions to pity and terror sincerer. It enormously strengthened his sense of proportion (his work has always lacked laughter) and it put his pre-war work into perspective for him. Indeed it seems pretty clear that not until this stage in his career did Hugh Walpole fully realize how closely linked were his apparently independent stories, that he had, so to say, been milling round in a circle. The egotism of the Duchess, Clare and Mrs. Trenchard, the hunting of Perrin, of Dune, of Martin, the flounderings of the God's-fools Harry, Stephen, Bunning, Mrs. Comber, John Trenchard, Maggie, the flickering up of cruelties in character after character, the actual or partial personification of the vice itself in Morelli, old Westcott, in Semyonov, the growing tendency to use a non-human existence—a fog, a house, a city, a town, a forest, a minister, with its benevolent or sinister influence, as a person of the tale—all these ingredients of his stories, as he must have begun to realize, were not congregated through a series of flukes.

And, realizing this, he must surely have instituted a stock-taking in the workshop. There emerged from the clearance, at any rate, a carefully concerted group of circumstances and characters which he was to use in their final forms; there had been evolved, through a series of books, the formula of a play with situations, motives, and figures. These people of the play were to be the fool-in-Christ, the devil incarnate, Everyman, and —the herd. The situations to be used were ordeal by fear, ordeal by loneliness, ordeal by love. The question to be discussed was whether the practice of evil by man, through the enjoyment of cruelty, was a necessity of living, or whether the final rescue of man from this particular sin of the spirit was a possibility. In other words, does Black or White win, and (with the war in his eyes) can the human being do anything at all to shorten the struggle or decide the victory?

There was yet another problem: how pose these questions so that the reader would not be bothered by them, should believe himself merely to be absorbed by a thoroughly exciting best-seller?

Hugh Walpole did not at first solve this last problem with complete satisfaction. *The Cathe-*

*dral,* indeed, had a success; but *The Old Ladies* was, I'm afraid, voted "too sordid and horrible" for the circulating libraries. It was the *Prelude-Fortitude* situation over again; but this time *The Cathedral,* a much better book than the early romance, came first. Only in its popularity, can it be compared with *Fortitude.* As a book it has much more in common with *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill:* indeed it might be described as, on a bigger scale, a *Perrin and Traill* in reverse; for Perrin is too lowly for his run-down-hill to be more noticeable than a poor man's slip on an orange peel.

But Archdeacon Brandon falls like Lucifer, and for Lucifer's cause—pride. Brandon is the most important person in the cathedral town (indeed in his early career and in his character he inevitably recalls Archdeacon Grantley) till Canon Ronder arrives.

> Mistletoe killing an oak—
> Rats gnawing cables in two—
> Moths making holes in a cloak—
> How they must love what they do!

Ronder, the amiable, selfish man of intrigue, loves what he does: and what he does is to under-

mine Brandon's authority, to upset his dignity, to cancel his charm. He is matador to a bull, and a bewildered one. Gradually Brandon realizes, as Perrin did, that he is an out-of-date failure. He discovers that his children fear him, that his wife hates him, that the town wishes him ill. He begins to waver, to make mistakes: he espouses the wrong side in a petty clerical dispute: he makes himself publicly ridiculous: he exposes himself in the malicious eyes of the town as a sham, just such another sham as the Duchess. More misfortunes befall him: his son marries unsuitably: his wife runs away with another man. Finally he is defeated in his fight for, as he sees it, the preservation of his passionately loved Cathedral from the hand of the spoiler, and dies of the shock of the defeat: and we are left to believe that not only does the town, but his idol, the Cathedral, rejoice in his final obliteration.

For the herd is cruel by nature, and the Cathedral, which is the creation of the herd, which is the power of the herd and the dreams of the herd rendered again in stone, has no mercy on the individual whose power to serve it has failed. The sick creature has no place in the herd, and Bran-

don is a sick creature. The stagnation of life in a narrow community has ruined him as it ruined Perrin, though he rots through excess of ease, where Perrin rots through want.

The tale is moving: the people in it live; yet throughout one feels that the author is preoccupied. He knows his individual Brandon so well that he can write of him with his mind elsewhere. And it is elsewhere: it is puzzled by the contradictions of the town, by the beauty now divine, now sinister, of the great Cathedral, by the hatred that bubbles up so instantly and easily where two or three are gathered together. He is already, it seems to me, before the tragedy of Brandon is over, asking himself—what would the town do if it were in conflict with a saint instead of a sinner? And then he draws back again from such dreams to examine first and more closely this ruling passion of humanity to hate, to hurt, to destroy.

He goes to these final explorations cautiously: to begin with he confines himself, as he did in the *Prelude,* to a subject well within his powers. In this first study of bare cruelty, bare lust, the community under examination consists of a lit-

tle group of forlorn old ladies. It is as if he said to himself, "let us be sane—let us not be utterly warped by the knowledge of evil that the war brought. Somewhere there must be human beings free of any acquaintance with these horrors."

And indeed could any set of creatures be, on the surface, more harmless than old Miss Beringer, old Mrs. Amorest, old Mrs. Payne, and the lodging-house keeper, Mrs Bloxam?

Poor old Lucy Amorest starves on a pittance, awaiting the improbable return of an only son. Poor old May Beringer is a foolish spinster with nothing to live for but a pet dog and a lump of amber that a friend once gave her. Poor old Mrs. Payne's only pleasures are food and bright colours and her greasy comforts. The three women have their rooms in the same house, and know each other well enough to visit and gossip.

Such a plot has, on the surface, little enough to do with the wars of ideas and the battle of the black and white guardians for the soul of man. What can we expect of such a scene and list of characters but *Cranford?*

We may expect it, but we do not get *Cranford.* We get instead the seven devils of Scripture.

Lust, anger, malice, fear, envy, cruelty and despair all let loose in that stuffy Victorian house. Agatha Payne covets May Beringer's lump of amber. May Beringer, terrified, resists because the amber, to her, represents the friend who gave it, the friend whom she loves with all her frightened rabbit soul. Her resistance rouses another devil in Agatha Payne. To lust is added cruelty. To her pleasure in plotting for the amber is added the pleasure of terrifying May Beringer:

> [May Beringer] could only gaze miserably upon that woman, still kneeling but turning her great shapeless body toward her, the blazing fire giving her black hair a glittering sheen.
>
> "I was going for a moment," May Beringer whispered, "into the passage."
>
> "No, I think not." Agatha Payne slowly rose, looking steadily at her. "If you want anything I can get it for you." Then her expression changed. "Ah! So you have it in your hand. I wondered where it was."
>
> May Beringer put the hand that clutched the amber behind her back. "Ah! Let me go! Please let me go!" she whispered.
>
> "I should think not." She took a step toward her. "You'll catch your death all naked. You get back into bed. I'm mistress here now. You want looking after, I can see." She made another slow lurching step toward her. May Beringer could not take her eyes from that face, nor that shining,

hair, nor that shapeless body. She crept back into bed and crouched there, her gray hair now all about her eyes, staring through her hair, the bed-clothes huddled about her.

Agatha Payne came over and sat down in the chair once more. . . .

May could only stare and stare; her breathing came in pants. Her body gave little jerks from time to time as though it were trying to shake from itself some dreadful weight. Her face was of a gray ivory shadow. Only her eyes, terrified, peered out like some one staring into the dark.

The candle gave a leap and went out.

But Agatha Payne indulges her devil once too often. May Beringer dies of fright and Agatha Payne left alone in the empty house to finish her life (for Mrs. Amorest escapes) learns in her turn what terror and despair can mean. But she does not learn what solitude means. The spirit of May Beringer sees to that.

*The Old Ladies* is, at any rate as far as the writing is concerned, the most technically perfect tale that Mr. Walpole has given us. It is the pendant, of course, to the *Prelude;* but it is finer work. The *Prelude* might be compared to a group from a cathedral doorway; but *The Old Ladies* is like one of those Chinese small intricate carvings in jade or carnelian, in which the

beauty of the group itself, its conception, composition, line, shape, story, is drowned and in a sense obliterated by the changing, flooding colour of the material itself, that shines through the shape it has been given. But for all its flashing beauty in the scheme of Mr. Walpole's general attack on his problem, *The Old Ladies* plays but a passive part. The book acts really as a preparative. It forces upon the reader a closer knowledge of certain phases in the history of the human soul, a knowledge which he has no desire to receive and would not, indeed, without such deliberate enforcement, be prepared to admit or accept.

For to some natures to face and to examine the workings of evil is more terrifying than to endure any other kind of personal pain. To such minds the descent into hell is really as much a part of the mystic agony of the crucifixion as the hours on Golgotha. There was no physical suffering involved, there was not even any personal mental agony to be endured by the Everyman Christian in his journey through the Valley of the Shadow. All that was endured in the Valley of Humiliation. Bunyan emphasizes the fact that

the suffering consisted purely in the visualization of evil.

It is a horror that some minds will not, dare not face. When Christian has got to the border of that valley,

there met him two men making haste to go back; to whom Christian spake as follows—

"Whither are you going?"

They said—"Back! Back! And we would have you do so too if either life or peace is prized by you."

"Why, what's the matter?" said Christian. . . . "What have you seen?"

MEN:

"Seen! Why the valley itself, which is dark as pitch; we also saw there the hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons of the pit: we heard also in that valley continual howling and yelling, as of a people under unutterable misery, who there sat bound in affliction and iron; and over that valley hang the discouraging clouds of confusion: death also does always spread his wings over it. In a word, it is every whit dreadful, being utterly without order."

CHRISTIAN:

"But I perceive not yet by what you have said but that this is my way to the desired haven."

It is by this phrase that Hugh Walpole justifies his deliberate confrontation of the reader with certain horrible and filthy secrets of the human

heart, secrets which, as a follower of tradition, he was bound to ignore or at least sterilize by attributing only to creatures beyond the human pale. A Vathek or a Quilp are acceptable because they are too fantastic in their sinning to disturb the reader's complacency. As for Iago and Aaron—they are Shakespeare's children: and Shakespeare may do as he pleases. (The Gentle Reader has long since sterilized Shakespeare, through bardolatry, as effectively as if he had had his plays burned in the recent Stratford conflagration.) But when the cardinal vices are shown cropping up in *Cranford,* then the alarmed reader is very apt to cry "Bad taste!" and ask what the censor is doing, or to murmur that they are afraid that Mr. Walpole is growing morbid.

"But," says Mr. Walpole, "I perceive not yet by what you have said but that this is my way to the desired haven. How am I to show you the kingdom of heaven unless I take you first on a tour through hell? Hell and heaven are both countries of the human heart, and it is my job as a novelist to explore these places. How little

you know if you think my *Old Ladies* a horrible book. Do you imagine that my Agatha Payne lived in hell? Not she! Hers was a mere twilight limbo. Let me tell you the story of a man with red hair.

## *CHAPTER XIII*

IN THE *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* Hugh Walpole perfects the method which is his special contribution to the traditive novel. The *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* is two stories in one, fitting each other like a glove to a hand, like an apple and its skin. Such a piece of vir-

tuosity was peculiarly necessary, for Mr. Walpole had to persuade his readers to listen to a story—as the saying is, not fit for publication. He could not tell it directly, yet it was necessary to his whole scheme of work that he should tell it. And tell it he did—in the form of a shocker.

For you can write anything so long as you call it a shocker. There is no abomination of crime that is not allowable so long as it is not taken seriously. Torture, murder, rape, the man hunt, every form of death are the commonplaces of the shocker, which is the old horror-novel come back into its own. The more devilishly ingenious the author, the more suitable is the book for popular consumption: the only condition that the Gentle Reader makes is that he should never be asked to take either seriously. If an author should be so foolish as to do that, he would be banned; and the author knows it. What is he to do when he has something to write that will not be pretty reading?

Clearly, write it as a shocker; and if he has Mr. Walpole's nerve, preface it by a friendly chat with the Gentle Reader, in which he says that of course some fools might prefer that the

incidents in the shocker had some deeper significance; but indeed and indeed they had nothing of the kind.

This is the story of Mr. Walpole's shocker. A harmless little American, bored with life and himself, meets an old friend of ours, Maradick, at a dinner. Maradick tells him with a significant look that if he wants "a change" he had better go to Treliss for a holiday—that Treliss is a queer place and places—

> "If you have the sort of things in you that stir them they produce in their turn *their* things . . . and always will for your kind . . . a sort of secret society; I believe . . . that Treliss might give you something of the same adventure that it gave me—if you want it to, that is—if you need it. Do you *want* adventure, romance, something that will pull you right out of yourself and test you, show you whether you *are* real or no, give you a crisis that will change you for ever? Do you want it?"

Mild little Harkness does want it. He is a bachelor with good health, some money, a love of beauty in any form, and a special passion for etchings. He does what he likes and does no one any harm but—how bored he is with himself! Treliss shall give him what it will, and he will

take it so thankfully. He goes: and already in the train, where he has an aimless conversation with a fellow traveller who is as like to Father Time as makes no matter, the sense of change is dizzily about him. He arrives, and mysteries thicken round him as he leaves the station. He is besought by a harassed stranger to bear a message to another harassed stranger: it may be bootlegging, but it may be romance! He arrives in the old beautiful inn with its tortuous passages and finds himself knee-deep in adventures. He overhears a scene between a young wife, terrified of he can't guess what, and her callous husband: then the husband's father, a man with red hair, makes his acquaintance: and with that the adventure begins.

For the stranger, David Dunbar, for whom he took the message, is trying to persuade the frightened wife, Hesther Crispin, to run away with him: and Harkness is told the secret, and other secrets. The young wife's terrors are no mere hysteria. Crispin, the man with red hair, has an uncanny reputation: he lives in a white towered house on the cliff with four Japanese servants and a silent automaton of a son, Herrick. He has

ruined the girl's father, has engineered her marriage with his son. He is now about to remove the girl from the country. Why?

"God knows! [says the lover]. He is a devil with power. How can one explain him?

"Before the war there were all sorts of things that didn't seem possible, we knew that they couldn't exist outside the books of the story-tellers. But the war's changed all that. There's nothing too horrible, nothing too beastly, nothing too bad to be true—yes, and nothing too fine, nothing too sporting."

Harkness can't follow it—hardly believes in the tale at all. But he agrees to help the lovers because the girl's terror moves him and because, too, all his normal prudences and timidities have been shaken out of him, as fifteen years ago they had been shaken out of Maradick by the excitement of the dance. He too has arrived on the night of the dance; and it makes him feel ready for anything. He with Dunbar, then, lays a plot of escape which Harkness furthers by visiting the red-headed man Crispin the same night.

Their interview is an extraordinary one. Crispin shows a liking for Harkness, who is half attracted, half repelled by his host's attitude. Cris-

pin, his treasures, above all his collection of prints, fascinates Harkness: there is, too, a pathos and a charm about the queer creature that intrigues him. But the fascination that Crispin exercises is not wholesome, and as he expounds his philosophy and describes the pleasures of pain, Harkness begins to understand that he is dealing with a madman. As Dunbar says:

> "I take it that the moment that anyone crosses the division between sanity and insanity it means that they can control their brain no longer, that they are dominated by some desire or ambition or lust or terror that nothing can stop, no fear of the law, of public shame, of losing social caste."

Crispin is a creature in whom all normal desires are turned topsy-turvy, and Harkness, watching him, talking to him, feeling the horror of his charm and the charm of his horror, realizes that the worst hell is heaven turned upside down: and that from such a hell this creature has come, with his passion for beauty and his terror of possession by beauty, his need to torture and destroy all that is lovely lest loveliness destroy him. He puts into words the tragedy of all evil as he cries, tearing the Orvieto into fragments, "What would

happen to me if I surrendered to all that beauty?"

Thus he shows to the shuddering Harkness his hell, dark as pitch, every whit dreadful, being utterly without order. In this pit of his mind cowers Crispin's soul "in unutterable misery, bound in afflictions and iron"—but Harkness is not yet changed enough to realize it: he realizes only that he is in the house of a dangerous devil and that the girl must be rescued: mild little sentimentalist that he is, he is beginning to be in love with the romantic misery of the girl.

The plot succeeds. He and the lover and his helper, Jabez, between them get Hesther out of the house and are off along the cliff to the boat and safety, when they stumble into a fog, lose each other, and after running in circles for hours, at last grope their way to a house that looms up out of the whiteness. They knock and enter: and find that they have walked back into the prison from which they had escaped. It is Crispin's house, and Crispin is waiting for them.

They are quite helpless in the hands of the Japanese servants and Crispin is perfectly definite in his plans. They have betrayed him and he intends to kill them—slowly. He begins his work;

but at this moment something happens to Crispin.

Do you remember Kipling's *Mark of the Beast?* Do you remember how, from the moment the curse of lycanthropy has been laid upon Fleete by the leper, the human soul begins to die out behind the eyes?

The same thing happens to Crispin. His mind was warped in childhood by cruelty. In manhood he has continued for himself the ruin begun upon it through practising cruelties in turn upon the helpless. But none whom he tortures suffers as his own mind suffers. He is his own executioner: and at the moment of his triumph he achieves his own destruction. His mind endures its last horror, snaps under the strain, and he becomes a mere howling mad dog, to be fought and mastered and at last pitched out of the window by one of his own prisoners. The nightmare ends with his death and the rescue of the little party by good daylight policemen.

So much for the shocker skeleton. But it is not on these externals that the reader's mind dwells as he closes the book. His mind remembers instead the ancient Chinese belief that to each man is allotted two souls—the *Hun* or superior

soul, and the *P'O*, the evil, the inferior soul which returns to the dust from which it came. He perceives with a certain thrill of excitement that this shocker is really the story once more of Everyman and his black and white guardians. Everyman has been through the war, which has changed all his values for him. Good and Evil—he knows no longer which is which. He has to make for himself new codes and new creeds. These remakings of his are described in the adventures of Harkness. Harkness—Everyman—also has his conception of life exploded for him. Every good and bad impulse in him has been awakened by the nature dance at Treliss. After the dance he is ready to meet his two souls—Crispin, the evil in him—Hesther, his dreams embodied. In the sea-fog, which is his own mental confusion externalized, he meets himself also, his neutral self, able to go Crispin's way or Hesther's way at will.

He faces his first temptation. He loves Hesther; but to take Hesther from Dunbar, as he knows he could do, is to go Crispin's way, to confuse love with the lust of possession. Hesther needs the illusion of a hero: and he, looking at his meagre little self, knows that he could not give

her that illusion for long. Loving her, he puts the possibility of life with her from him, and so learns one of his lessons—"What I take I lose: what I give I have!"

In the darkness of the Tower his self-judgment is renewed. He has to see himself half surrendered to his own horror of physical pain. He has to know himself for a weakling, a coward, and a mean fool: a small soul fit only for the ministrations of the Button-moulder:

> Dimly it came through to him that he had been given three tests to-night, and, as it always is in life, the three tests especially suited to his character, his strength and weakness, his past history. The dance had stripped him of his aloofness and drawn him into life, his love for Hesther that he had surrendered had taken from him his selfishness —and now he must lose his fear of pain.

But when this ordeal is faced and survived, then Everyman knows himself free, safe for ever from the Button-moulder:

> I've danced the town, I've climbed the rocks, I've dared the devil, I've fallen in love, and I know at last that there's such a hunger for beauty in my soul that it must go on and on. I've done nothing with it until last night, but now when I've needed it it's come to my help. I've touched life at last. I'm alive. I never can die any more! . . . Hesther, never

lose courage. Remember that he can't touch you, that no one can touch you. You're your own immortal mistress.

And, a free spirit, Everyman has time and will to remember that tortured lower self, to hope and plan for its deliverance out of the valley of death:

He staggered to his bed, flung himself down, still smiling. His eyes closed. There floated up to him a face—a little white face crowned with red hair, but not evil now, not animal—friendly, lonely, asking for something. . . .

He smiled, promising something. Lifted his hand. Then his hand fell, and he sank deep, deep, deep into happy, blissful slumber.

It is fortunate that Mr. Walpole warned us in his preface that "allegory is a dangerous thing: that this is a tale and nothing but a tale," or we might be taking the *Man with Red Hair* as seriously as we take the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

## *CHAPTER XIV*

IN HIS "shocker" Hugh Walpole puts down his final impression of the fight between Everyman and his own lower nature. To complete his philosophy of life he must balance that *Portrait* by an impression of Everyman fighting his own superior soul. He has attempted it in book after

book—in *The Captives,* in *The Golden Scarecrow,* in *The Cathedral,* and particularly, of course, in *Prelude to Adventure.* In *Harmer John* he makes the final picture for which these early pieces were but sketches. The *Portrait* is the story of man—devil: *Harmer John* is the story of man—god. Everyman is personified in the first story as Harkness, while in *Harmer John* he is represented by the inhabitants of a city.

The theme of the book is simple. Hugh Walpole takes as his guiding phrase the Nazarene's whimsical remark:

> For the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

The phrase was the expression of knowledge sub-consciously garnered by the human spirit through five thousand years of muddled human living: which is, of course, one of the reasons why Christianity endures; for a truth perfectly expressed never degenerates into a mere wise saw: it becomes, to minds bewildered by the problems of life, a clinging post as welcome and necessary

as a bollard to a fisherman landing his boat in rough weather.

"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light," could only be said by one who, God or man, knew his world through and through. Whether we worship or deride the children of light, we are forced to recognize the truth of the paradox. The recognition of it, indeed, was the beginning of all knowledge. When our Norse forefathers fashioned their heaven and filled it with the Æsir, the children of light, who warred perpetually against the giants of the ice and snow and northern darkness, they but embodied in a tale their recognition of the eternal strife between two opposed ways of human living and thinking. They foresaw, too, what would come of such opposition when Fenrir the Wolf is unchained and the Midgard Snake stirs in the waters, and their sister Hel rises from the underworld: and Loki released, leads his children of darkness against the children of light: in that hour will the divine folly be made manifest. Tyr, who gave his hand to save his fellows, will fight left-handed at Ragnarok, and Odin, who plucked out his eye to buy wisdom,

will blunder in the battle, half blind: and weaponless Frey will long in vain for the sword which he exchanged for love. Yet when the children of light and the giants of darkness have slain each other, there will remain the gifts which the children have purchased at the cost of victory—Odin's wisdom, Tyr's selflessness, Frey's love: and these will create a new heaven and a new earth.

Thus our forefathers feigned, recognizing a strange fact that the human race was beginning to discover—the fact that the sacrificial folly of the children of light is an eternal blessing to humanity, while the wisdom of the children of this world serves its generation only, and endures no longer.

But the world learns slowly and, in truth, these children of light, these born losers of life, do not make the lesson easy. It is not merely that they speak another language, that their whole sense of values is other than ours, that their dross is our gold, that they say to our good, "Be thou my evil!" but that they do so seldom trouble to explain themselves.

As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels looked like torment and insanity——

begins Blake somewhere, defiantly, and, like the rest of the children, without a scruple of pity for the Gentle Reader who cannot instantly follow his thought. For it is the singular fault of the children of light that, though they will give their lives to save the souls of the children of this world, they refuse all sympathy for, and utterly refuse to attempt to understand, the worldly point of view. I suppose it is an impossibility to them: it would imply a change of nature. Light cannot become darkness without ceasing to be. "What would happen to me if I surrendered to all that ugliness?" cries the child of light.

But it is hard on us of this world! We feel that we could put up with all the strangenesses of the children of light, that we would not wait till they are dead to worship them, if only they would be content to live and let live, if only they could be brought to realize that we have a right to our point of view. But the children of light have no notion of compounding with us. Even the fail-

ures among them, even the blind children stick to their losses.

"Why faintest thou? I wandered till I died.
Roam on! The light we sought is shining still——"

sighs Thyrsis.

"Roses, only roses," falters St. Elizabeth.

"Over the mountains
Of the moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride!"

counsels Poe.

Don Quixote interrupts with:

"Every hour be ready to attempt impossibility itself!"

while Ibsen's Brand sums up the children's view of the situation in a hoarse shriek of

"The devil is compromise!"

He sticks to it, the friendless, childless, homeless fanatic, insists on it in spite of the garnered experience of all statesmen, rulers and kings of this world: and in due course, as the children of this world could have told him, is overwhelmed by his avalanche.

For the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

And even those immeasurably greater than the Brands and the Quixotes, such Shining Ones in that company as Bunyan saw, display the same terrible imperviousness to our logic and our common sense. How is a colonial governor, zealous in his office, to cope with one accused of sedition who tells him bluntly, "My kingdom is not of this world!"? How are Athenian magistrates to uphold the dignity of law when a prisoner, convicted of being "an evil-doer, who meddles with enquiries into things beneath the earth, and in heaven, and who 'makes the worse appear the better reason,' and who teaches others these same things," remarks, "If I am to propose the penalty which I really deserve, I propose this, a public maintenance in the Prytaneum," and when his suggestion is dismissed and he is condemned to death, continues, "If you think that you will restrain men from reproaching you for your evil lives by putting them to death, you are very much mistaken. That way of escape is hardly possible, and it is not a good one. . . . My friends, I think

it is a much harder thing to escape from wickedness than from death; for wickedness is swifter than death. And now I, who am old and slow, have been overtaken by the slower pursuer: and my accusers, who are clever and swift, have been overtaken by the swifter pursuer, which is wickedness. And now I shall go hence, sentenced by you to death; and they will go hence, sentenced by truth to receive the penalty of wickedness and evil. And I abide by this award as well as they. Perhaps it was right for these things to be so; and I think that they are fairly measured."

How is the wisdom of this world to deal with such an attitude but by hemlock, crucifix, fire, sword, stoning, or by the laughter that kills as it killed the very noble child of light, Don Quixote? How can the dignity of the Church be maintained when one of its saints holds a service for the fish of the sea, and another insists on preaching to the fowls of the air? Yet we celebrate the folly of St. Francis, not the wisdom of the clerics: and Socrates's judges are a by-word, and Joan's judges are a by-word, and Pilate the intellectual remains in men's minds as the man who had the most stupendous chance

ever vouchsafed to mortal man, and was too worldly-wise to take it.

Always do the children of light have the best of us. No sooner do we police one corner of the life of this world than these gamblers of the Holy Ghost invade and upset another. Even the world of modern art is not free of them.

It is indeed a remarkable thing that, in an age devoted to the worship of material and intellectual success, one of the acutest minds of the time should have been constantly preoccupied with this problem of the children of light. In half the plays of Bernard Shaw we find the hint, the shadow, the eidolon of the type he perfected in St. Joan. Dubedat, Marshbanks, Vivie, Mrs. George, Major Barbara, Androcles, Kegan, Tanner, Brassbound, and the Devil's Disciple, Shotover, Lilith, Mrs. Knox—what are these but sketches for the final portrait of St. Joan?

But Bernard Shaw is not the only writer of the day who has explored the unreasonable chronicles of the children of light, and found in them "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." A Gordon or a Damien, "so much a better man than either you or me,

who did what we have never dreamed of daring," leaves his mark not only on the actual history of his age, but on the minds of writers not concerned with the use of words as Shaw and Galsworthy and Wells use them, as instruments of attack, instruction, or reform. Cried Stevenson, who heaven knows was no preacher:

> The man who tried to do what Damien did is my father, and the father of the man in the Apia bar, and the father of all who love goodness; and he was your father too, if God had given you the grace to see it.

The effect of another child of the type on a Kipling is shown clearly enough in the drawing of the Lama throughout *Kim:* and Conrad, I think, was feeling after the same thing in his portrait of Lena and Heyst in *Victory;* though he expresses it only through Heyst's bitter cry of frustration:

> "Ah, Davidson, woe to the young man whose heart has not learned while young, to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life."

But I know only one writer of our day who has given us in a tale a satisfying modern portrait of this eternal figure; for *St. Joan* is history.

Hugh Walpole has been worrying at his problem for twenty years—"What is evil?" "What is good?" We have seen how he answered the first question, finally, in the *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair.* The second question he answered for our age, it seems to me, in *Harmer John,* a book so radiant and so moving that I am half afraid to put down the degree of admiration I feel for it, lest its beauty should be cheapened by easy praise.

The story is so simply written that a child could follow and enjoy it: it has, now and then, an odd air of having been written by an experienced child. The title with the headings of the three parts gives the theme: *Harmer John*—"His arrival"—"Of how he stayed with us"—"How he left us"—and the plot follows the ancient formula, is a modern version of the history of all saviours. Like the gods—Adonis, Dionysus, Balder; like the heroes—Arthur, Lohengrin, Quetzalcoatl—"Harmer John comes, a stranger from a far country, to a stagnating community, is welcomed, idolized, rejected, and slain. But when his life is over, his story is not over, for he leaves the people of his adoption better than he found them, and possessed by the belief

that he is not really dead, but will, when the time is ripe, return to them again.

So much for the skeleton of the story. Its technical interest for the student of the traditive novel lies, of course, in the use, in a perfectly modern manner, of one of the oldest traditions in life or literature. Hugh Walpole has told us plainly the tale of a man of our own time, halo-less and comprehensible. He has let him live his life in such a town as we all know, and confronted him with a situation that might occur to any one of us. Harmer John, a young Scandinavian, comes one night to the prim and ancient cathedral town of Polchester: and because he likes the beautiful old place and the kind, friendly people, he settles down there, falls in love with the daughter of his landlady, and practises his profession: he is an athlete who runs a gymnasium, and runs it well. He is a simple creature, strong, handsome, charming, and the principal people of the town approve of him. He becomes the fashion, and his future as a money-maker and an institution of which it can be proud is clear enough—to Polchester! It is not so clear to himself. He dreams. He dreams of devoting all his gifts and energies

to this English town with which he has fallen in love: he sees it as the centre of a revival of passionate interest in the arts and crafts of beauty: he sees, too, how easy it would be, through his business of teaching men to care for their bodies, to persuade them to give the same sort of care to their souls. Indeed, part of the pathetic charm of this new conception of the child of light is the fact that in Harmer John's own trained, strong, beautiful body, which all his pupils are so anxious to resemble, appear, as it were in parable, those beauties of the spirit that they cannot see and do not desire to possess.

For Polchester, which chuckled over the fall of Brandon, is not kind, is not friendly, is not beautiful, as Harmer John believes. The better quarters of the town are torn by jealousies and bitternesses, split up into cliques, riddled by intrigues: and its slums are a hell. Harmer John, in his crazy innocence, proposes to alter this state of affairs. But the elders of the town, liking him as one likes a jolly child, a harmless pet, explain to him that if he is to be successful he must let Polchester alone. He must do as Polchester tells him, but never tell Polchester what to do. Finally

the young girl whom he passionately loves sides with the town and gives him his choice of her or his dreams.

Then, and only then, do reader and town begin to realize that this pleasant Harmer John is not a handsome friendly fool, but a resolved man. The man suffers his temptation in the wilderness: he conquers his devils: he goes his own obstinate, unpopular way, opposing to the growing anger, hostility, malice, and scorn of the townsfolk, his unshaken faith in his dreams: until, in the end, he loses his life in a slum riot, having done only one actual thing for the town and the people he loved. He has not built New Jerusalem: he has only cleaned, mended, and set up again in its place a little lost fountain, the work of a forgotten artist, that lay in the ruins by the roadside in one of the Polchester streets.

But six years later the repentant town is busy putting up in the new streets, ugly still, but better than the slums in which he lost his life, a tablet to the memory of "A Friend of this Town."

Yet even this apotheosis does not end the tale of *Harmer John.* Hugh Walpole does not waste

one dry bone of his tradition. Some people—the girl he loved is among them—

> had the maddest idea . . . thought that he was not dead. . . . It was all silly foolishness, but many people besides Maude had the same idea—ignorant people of course. He had been seen in the woods above Orange Street, on Parmiter's Field, he had haunted the disappearing ruin of the old sea-town, "always laughing, always jolly they say he is. I wouldn't think," continued Mrs. Penethen, "anything at all about it if it didn't disturb Maude so. But the girl's always thinking about it, expecting him to turn up one day."

Thus Elsa watched for Lohengrin: thus the Mayas expected their White Saviour: thus the children of this world have always waited and looked and longed for the children of light whom they banished. And so Mr. Walpole brings his wheel full circle.

## *CHAPTER XV*

WITH *Harmer John* the second period of Hugh Walpole's writing life closes; for his latest story, *Wintersmoon,* is, like *The Captives,* an interlude piece. It is a rch, leisurely tale of modern life. It brings up to date that social chronicle which was begun in *The Duchess,* and continued

in *The Green Mirror* and *The Captives.* It deals with private and personal histories rather than with ideas, and though Rosalind and Janet clearly stand for two types of humanity and two stages of human experience, still the book as a whole is a deliberate return to tradition for rest and refreshment: the new third period is not yet begun.

What type of experiment is preparing? The only person who can answer that question is the traditive novelist's partner. The English Gentle Reader has lately shown quite clearly that the final result of the post-war literary upheavels is to reawaken his interest in tradition. The success of such books as *Eminent Victorians, Outline of History, Jud Süss* is significant: significant too is the interest shown in thinly disguised chronicles of contemporary history such as *The American Tragedy.*

That so traditive a novelist as Hugh Walpole will be influenced by these awakening interests of the generation that produced him, is probable; but prophecy is a barren business. This brief survey is concerned only to discover what contribution so popular and prominent a writer of

the hour has really made to the English tradition. Has he a right to take his place among the true traditives, or must he be reckoned as a mere traditionalist, reaping the easy harvest others have sown?

He stands or falls by the collective impressions made upon the reader by his twenty-odd books. Is this succession of stories arbitrary, or is it the ordered expression, by an original mind, of its thoughts on life and art? Are these volumes, that is to say, sentences in a discussion between him and his reader, or are they the irrelevant ejaculations of a literary cheapjack crying his wares?

Here, at any rate, as I read them, are the sentences:

Says *The Wooden Horse*—

"Progress and preservation are opposed ideals. If one is good, must the other be evil? What is good? What is evil?"

*Maradick at Forty*—

"How can we tell? All we know is this—that good and evil are furious forces, fighting for control of humanity."

*Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*—

"Are we sure? Doesn't the human creature create his own good and evil?"

*Prelude to Adventure*—

"How can he, when there is no evil? Opposition to God's will creates an illusion of unhappiness, and that we call evil. This is the answer!"

*Fortitude*—

"If only it were the answer! But I wonder sometimes if there is any God at all, save man, who begets through suffering his own immortal soul—and its mother's name is Fortitude."

*The Duchess of Wrexe*—

"But is the soul immortal? The race may be, but not the individual. *Tout passe, tout s'effuie!*"

*The Golden Scarecrow*—

"Yet trailing clouds of glory do we come."

*The Dark Forest*—

"And though we are babes in a wood, at the other end of the wood the glory shines again through the thinning trees."

*Jeremy*—

"A wood with its aisles is a cathedral, a place to worship God in. Why are you afraid of a cathedral and its town?"

*The Secret City*—

"But what if the town has changed in the night, and strange souls have slipped into our old bodies?"

*The Captives*—

"How can they? Wood, city, world—good and evil itself—are but illusions. Love is the only reality."

*The Young Enchanted*—

"Love is pure magic."

*The Cathedral*—

"Forget not the impure magics"—

*The Old Ladies*—

"Lust, cruelty, despair"—

*Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*—

"For the devil is come down to you having power."

*Harmer John*—

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of God shall lift up a standard against him, and the Redeemer shall come to Zion."

It is a view of existence that the Gentle Reader takes or leaves or modifies as he pleases. The author's share in the business is ended when he has brought his harvest to the market place. But that he is able to do so, that it has become pos-

sible for a writer to use the art of writing novels as some men use the art of ruling a kingdom, in order to express year by year his changing, his broadening opinions upon life and its problems —this is a marvellous development. It is dazzling to compare the tentative tales of the experimenting Elizabethan story-teller, too humble even to be envious of the opportunities of the dramatist, or the only-a-novel point of view of which Jane Austen complains so bitterly, with the power of the novel to-day.

And the reader and the writer alike owe their freedom of this city of art, not to the genius of this or that ancient or modern author, or to the receptive comprehension and welcome of this or that individual reader, but to the generations of readers and writers alike, to the Olympians and men of Grub Street, to the highbrows, Philistines, scholars, pedants, ladies of leisure and the children at Mother Goose's skirts who between them created and still create the ever-renewed tradition of the English novel.

And as literature is, for all its glory, no more than a comment on life, as New York is no more than a comment on America, so the real purpose

of such a survey as this must be to overhear and report that comment:

"A nation that is bounded by its tradition is dead: a nation that despises its tradition is damned; but a nation that uses its traditions and adds to its traditions has, in life as in literature, the future of the world in its hands."

Truisms? Certainly! What else is the traditive novelist, but a man who tells old truth in new ways and new truths in old ways?

*February–November, 1928.*

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